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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



September 2011

Vol. 116, No. 9

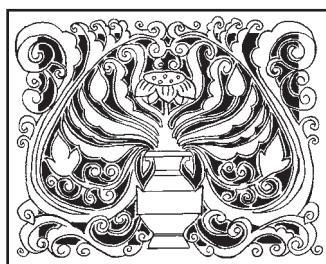


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started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896*

**Vol. 116, No. 9**  
**September 2011**



Amrita Kalasha

**EDITORIAL OFFICE**  
Prabuddha Bharata  
Advaita Ashrama  
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat  
Dt Champawat · 262 524  
Uttarakhand, India  
E-mail: [prabuddhabharata@gmail.com](mailto:prabuddhabharata@gmail.com)  
[pb@advaitaashrama.org](mailto:pb@advaitaashrama.org)

**PUBLICATION OFFICE**  
Advaita Ashrama  
5 Dehi Entally Road  
Kolkata · 700 014  
Tel: 91 · 33 · 2264 0898 / 2264 4000  
2286 6450 / 2286 6483  
E-mail: [mail@advaitaashrama.org](mailto:mail@advaitaashrama.org)

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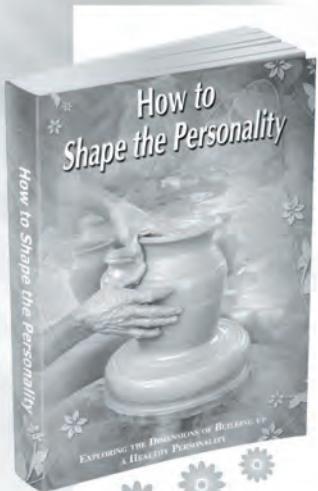
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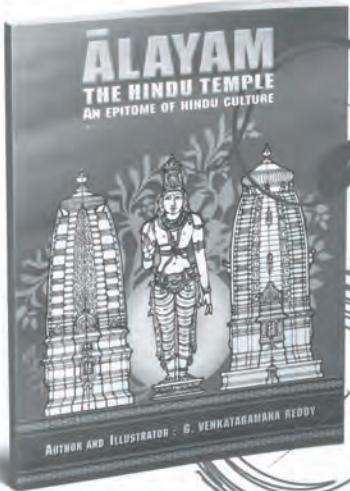


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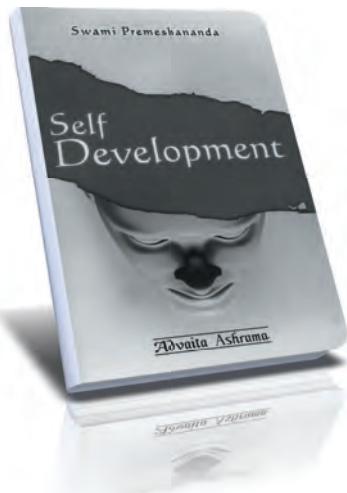
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# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राय वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*



## *The Universal Being*

September 2011  
Vol. 116, No. 9

स यथाद्र्देवधाग्नेरभ्याहितात्युथरधूमा विनिश्चरन्ति एवं वा अरेऽस्य महतो भूतस्य  
निःश्वसितमेतद्यद्गवेदो यजुर्वेदः सामवेदोऽथर्वाद्विरस इतिहासः पुराणं विद्या  
उपनिषदः श्लोकाः सूत्राण्यनुव्याख्यानानि व्याख्यानानि अस्यैवैतानि निःश्वसितानि ॥

As from a fire kindled with wet faggot diverse kinds of smoke issue, even so my dear, the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, Atharvanga, history, mythology, arts, Upanishads, pithy verses, aphorisms, elucidations, and explanations are (like) the breath of this infinite Reality. They are like the breath of this (supreme Self).

*(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 2.4.10)*

तदेतत् सत्यं  
यथा सुदीप्तात्पावकाद्विस्फुलिङ्गाः सहस्रशः प्रभवन्ते सरूपाः ।  
तथाऽक्षराद्विविधाः सोम्य भावाः प्रजायन्ते तत्र चैवापि यन्ति ॥

That thing that is such, is true: As from a fire fully ablaze, fly off sparks in their thousands that are akin to the fire, similarly O good-looking one, from the Imperishable originate different kinds of creatures and into It again they merge.

*(Mundaka Upanishad, 2.1.1)*

नीलः पतङ्गो हरितो लोहिताक्षस्तडिद्गर्भं ऋतवः समुद्राः ।  
अनादिमत् त्वं विभुत्वेन वर्तसे यतो जातानि भुवनानि विश्वा ॥

You indeed are the blue bee; You indeed are the green (parrot) having red eyes; you indeed are possessed of lightning in your womb. You indeed are the seasons and the seas. You indeed are without beginning; you exist as the Omnipresent, from whom have sprung all the worlds.

*(Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 4.4)*

# THIS MONTH

'Knowledge exists in the mind,' says Swami Vivekananda. **The Flash Within** examines this dynamics through the cognitive processes.

In **How to Spiritualize Our Activities** Swami Girishananda, manager of the Ramakrishna Math at Belur, explains each step of karma yoga, its efficacy, and its fulfilment.



the first part of **Education for Enablement**.

Environmental science also needs ethics for its effectiveness. Rhyddhi Chakraborty in **Buddhist Approach to Deep Ecological Problems** gives us a better way to view ecology. The author is pursuing a PhD in the department of humanities and social sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur.



The Sinai desert is inextricably linked with three faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Dr Dipak



Sengupta, former chief general manager of Coal India Limited, visits the ancient **Saint Catherine Monastery** built at the foot of the Mountain of Moses.

Pritha Lal, who lives and works in the US, touchingly describes how the **Simplicity in Holy Mother's Words** penetrates deep into one's heart and acts as a source of spirituality and strength.

Swami Tathagatananda, head of the Vedanta Society of New York, continues with **Swami Vivekananda's Concern for Common Humanity**. It was this concern that endeared Swamiji to India and the world.



In the concluding part of **Significance of the Term Putra in Vedic Literature**, Kamalika Mazumder, MA in Ancient History and Culture and MPhil in History, Calcutta University, shows how the gender neutrality of *putra* is shadowed in the Krishna Yajur Veda and the Brahmana literature; yet, the author deduces glimpses of the original meaning.

Dr M Sivaramkrishna, former head of the department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad, reviews Swami Chetanananda's latest publication: **Mahendra Nath Gupta (M): The Recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna**.

# ***The Flash Within***

**H**UMAN COGNITION IS an amazing process from which stems knowledge through the senses, thought, and memory. It encapsulates perception and judgement, mind and body, the conscious and subconscious mind. Apart from the five sensory apparatus, cognition also springs from proprioception—stimulus regarding posture and position in space, internal conditions, and balance—and cognizance of sensations such as pain or discomfort. Extrasensory perception like telepathy, clairvoyance, and clairaudience may also have a place in the process. Moreover, the senses, the body, the brain, memory, and the environment are in a constant state of flux, for which cognition is likely to be distorted. It is true that the cognitive faculty is distinct from the emotional and the volitional, but since feeling and willing are also part of the mind, they interfere with cognition and sometimes even give rise to cognition. Therefore, pure cognition bereft of extraneous factors is impossible.

Cognition gives rise to re-cognition, thought, insight, that is, to knowledge and understanding. Its three main divisions are: input or assimilation, learning or accommodation, and output or action. In the first stage cognition arising from sensations, whether of the body or through the senses, enters the mind. This information is accommodated within a mental paradigm—we all have paradigms or internal models of the world, which are created through education and interaction with the environment. Genetic factors also play a role in the quality of the cognitive

instruments. At this juncture appear perception and judgement. The third stage, called output, occurs when perception and judgement are translated into abstract thought, mental images, language, and action. A simple or a complex cognition, in its three divisions, always results in raising the mind one notch higher or in a shifting of the internal paradigm. Of course, no two cognitions are similar and no two persons have a similar cognition, a similar language, nor have they similar reactions or power of work. Swami Vivekananda teaches: 'Man is, as it were, a centre, and is attracting all the powers of the universe towards himself, and in this centre is fusing them all and again sending them off in a big current. Such a centre is the *real* man—the almighty, the omniscient—and he draws the whole universe towards him. Good and bad, misery and happiness, all are running towards him and clinging round him; and out of them he fashions the mighty stream of tendency called character and throws it outwards.'

We may not be aware of the lightning-speed process, though we obtain its fruit: knowledge. Swamiji says that 'the goal of mankind is knowledge', not pleasure or happiness. Secondly, all these processes fall under the category of karma; in fact, every mental, verbal, physical activity is karma. Thirdly, 'no knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside.' All cognitions are like blows uncovering the knowledge that 'is inherent in man'; hence, what we learn is what we, 'in strict psychological language', discover within or what is unveiled.

In this universe nothing is absolutely good or absolutely bad. In these conscious and unconscious processes lurks a powerful enemy difficult to subdue. This enemy, as Acharya Shankara says, 'has many inscrutable characteristics'. In the *Bhagavadgita* Arjuna asks Sri Krishna: 'Impelled by what does this man commit sin even against his wish, being constrained by force, as it were?' The answer is significant for this age; Bhagavan says that it is 'desire and anger', which is a 'great devourer, a great sinner'. This enemy, which is like an insatiable fire, has made its home in the senses, mind, and intellect. It covers knowledge, deludes, and finally destroys the person.

The whole cognitive process is contaminated with this enemy. As it enters the cognitive process through the senses, this enemy can be discerned like fire and smoke. As it enters deeper, it mars the mind like covering a mirror with a coat of dust. And when this enemy penetrates further, it completely covers the intellect like a womb envelops a foetus. The best time to restrain this enemy is when it starts entering the senses, for then it is easily detected. As it penetrates deeper, the dust-coated mirror in a room full of dust can only be detected with greater difficulty, because one has to run one's fingers on the innumerable objects strewn about. But when the mirror is discovered by its shape and texture, one can begin cleaning it. If this enemy enters the intellect, it is almost impossible to destroy it, because the enemy completely engulfs the intellect and feeds it, like a womb feeding the foetus. This intellect believes that 'I am perfectly fine', even while perpetrating the most horrible crimes. Desire and anger sweep away our education, culture, and intelligence, to the extent of injuring others, injuring society and the environment.

Sri Krishna, of course, also gives Arjuna the solution to destroy this enemy that is born of *rajo-guna*. It is a long process, but it has to be

undertaken with earnestness. The first step is, naturally, to spiritualize work. Spiritualizing work has three methods: *jnana*, *bhakti*, and 'work for work's sake'. These methods loosen the enemy's hold on the cognitive processes. Gradually, as spiritual work becomes stronger, it frees cognition from the impurities of desire and anger. One's personality undergoes a change and a new character is formed with lofty and spiritual thoughts, words, and deeds, all of which are streamed in the world. Sri Krishna teaches: 'The sense organs are superior (to the body); the mind is superior to the organs; but the intellect is superior to the mind. However, the one who is superior to the intellect is He.' This is the centre where the enemy cannot enter, though it had succeeded in corrupting the senses, the mind, and the intellect. Through spiritualized work, through real education, and through understanding that the environment is not different from our bodies and minds, one's mind becomes *sattvic* and acquires spiritual absorption in the Self. Such a mind develops tremendous strength and can easily conquer the enemy.

Sri Ramakrishna says of his Vedanta guru Totapuri: 'Nangta also could understand things that way, in a flash—the meaning of the *Gita*, the *Bhagavata*, and other scriptures.' One whose cognition and knowledge are purified becomes free, because the light of the omniscient and omnipotent Self shines unhindered and uninterrupted. This is the real fruit of this amazing cognitive process, unimpeded by the enemy called desire and anger. In a free person the higher knowledge about Reality flashes in every cognition, as the *Kena Upanishad* says: 'It [Brahman] is really known when It is known with [as the Self of] each state of consciousness, because thereby one gets immortality. [Since] through one's own Self is acquired strength, [therefore] through knowledge is attained immortality.'

# How to Spiritualize Our Activities

Swami Girishananda

**S**PIRITUALIZING WORK IS NOT something difficult, mysterious, or meant only for highly advanced sadhakas; it is essential for every spiritual aspirant. It is true that 'the course of action is inscrutable,' as the Bhagavadgita states,<sup>1</sup> but Swami Vivekananda, in his 'Work and Its Secret', has shown that one should not lay emphasis on the results of karma; instead, one is invited to concentrate on the process and psychology of karma. The Gita also teaches: 'skilfulness in karma is yoga' (2.50); and Swamiji says:

One of the greatest lessons I have learnt in my life is to pay as much attention to the means of work as to its end. ... We forget that it is the cause that produces the effect; the effect cannot come by itself; and unless the causes are exact, proper, and powerful, the effect will not be produced. Once the ideal is chosen and the means determined, we may almost let go the ideal, because we are sure that it will be there, when the means are perfected. When the cause is there, there is no more difficulty about the effect; the effect is bound to come. If we take care of the cause, the effect will take care of itself. The realization of the ideal is the effect. The means are the cause: attention to the means, therefore, is the great secret of life.<sup>2</sup>

## Nishkama Karma

*Nishkama* karma, work without desires, paves the way to liberation by purifying the mind of its dross. In the Gita it has been emphasized to work incessantly, but without attachment. Swamiji also says:

Attachment is the source of all our pleasures now. We are attached to our friends, to our relatives; we are attached to our intellectual and spiritual works; we are attached to external objects, so that we get pleasure from them. What, again, brings misery but this very attachment? We have to detach ourselves to earn joy. If only we have the power to detach ourselves at will, there would not be any misery. That man alone will be able to get the best of nature, who, having the power of attaching himself to a thing with all his energy, has also the power to detach himself when he should do so. The difficulty is that there must be as much power of attachment as that of detachment (2.3).

There is a danger, however, in misunderstanding the concept of detachment. If we are completely detached from everything we may become indifferent, callous, and inert like a wall. Hence, Swamiji cautions us: 'The man who never loves, who is hard and stony, escaping most of the miseries of life, escapes also its joys. We do not want that. That is weakness, that is death' (*ibid.*).

So, how to achieve the equilibrium between attachment and detachment? On the one side there is powerful attraction, on the other cruel detachment. Attraction, passion, and work are evident in a person whose nature is rajasic; while the tendency towards inaction, laziness, callousness, and lack of interest in working for some end is prevalent in those who are tamasic. Passions and attachments are born out of egotism, jealousy, hankering, and false discernment; whereas all negative detachment arise from hatred, aversion, vindictiveness, and destructive tendencies. Of course, tamasic people are so steeped in languor

that there is no scope of any development unless they become a bit rajasic. Finally, the equilibrium between *rajas* and *tamas* can be obtained by acquiring the quality of *sattva*. A sattvic person divests himself or herself not from work but from the fruits of action. Such a person harmonizes both attachment and detachment without losing equilibrium or sacrificing any of the values of the sattvic state, which are steadfastness, fortitude, calmness, selflessness, and energy. Sattvic persons have conquered passions and do not hanker after fame, nor do they suffer agony, depression, and frustration. They can withstand the tremendous reactions of negative and positive forces unleashed by karma through a constant recollection of God. This is the natural process of mental purification as taught in the Gita: 'This man becomes bound by actions other than that action meant for God. Without being attached, O son of Kunti, you perform actions for Him (God).'<sup>3</sup>

To attain the state of *sattva* there are two well-known and tested methods. The first one is based on the principle that the world cannot act on the ever free Atman. This method is like a magician's attitude. Just as a magician, who knows well that he is performing magic, so a spiritual aspirant gives his best performance in the world of day-to-day activities remembering all the while that the world is an ephemeral large stage. The sadhaka concentrates on the work in hand and remains unperturbed by its inevitable joys and sorrows. The body, the sensory and motor organs, and the mind are used as instruments; hence, not a ripple overpowers the soul. This is taught in the Gita: 'Therefore, remaining unattached, always perform the obligatory duty, for, by performing (one's) duty without attachment, a person attains the Highest' (3.19). Acharya Shankara comments on this verse: 'A person attains the highest, liberation, through the purification of the mind.'

Sri Ramakrishna's parable about a jnani farmer

elucidates this point even further. A farmer lost his only son, of whom he was very fond of. The farmer's wife called him cruel and hard-hearted because he did not shed a single tear for his son. But the farmer explained to her that the reason for his behaviour was that the previous night he had a dream in which he had become a king and father of seven sons, all great in virtue and valour. So when he woke up, he kept wondering whether he should weep for those seven princes or for this one boy.<sup>4</sup> Detachment from the fruits of work makes us step back from things a little, and as a consequence we can see them in a better perspective. This perspective will free us from the thraldom of the idea of agency and make us realize that God alone is the agent.

This path demands constant vigilance and discernment. This kind of mental strength can thwart any illusions about the world and the tendency of the ego to project itself on some achievements. In this way the aspirant strives to keep an equilibrium. This equanimity is yoga, according to the Gita.<sup>5</sup>

The second method of spiritualizing work is by dedicating it and its results to the Lord. Sri Krishna teaches: 'O son of Kunti, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as a sacrifice, whatever you give and whatever austerities you undertake, (all) that you offer to Me' (9.27). This is perhaps the easiest path for souls who cannot shake off their attachment to the results. This type of work becomes *nishkama*. Such a devotional attitude assures one the supreme result of enlightenment, as Sri Krishna declares: 'O Partha, for them who have their minds absorbed in Me, I become, without delay, the deliverer from the sea of the world, which is fraught with death' (12.7).

### **A Third Path**

The third mode of work is elucidated by Swamiji in his *Karma Yoga*:

Although a man has not studied a single system of philosophy, although he does not believe in any God, and never has believed, although he has not prayed even once in his whole life, if the simple power of good actions has brought him to that state where he is ready to give up his life and all else for others, he has arrived at the same point to which the religious man will come through his prayers and the philosopher through his knowledge; and so you may find that the philosopher, the worker, and the devotee, all meet at one point, that one point being self-abnegation. However much their systems of philosophy and religion may differ, all mankind stand in reverence and awe before the man who is ready to sacrifice himself for others.<sup>6</sup>

This is the path of 'work for work's sake', of self-abnegation, of absolute unselfishness. Today spiritualizing work either through jnana, bhakti, or 'work for work's sake' is a chief characteristic of most monastic organizations. Without this basic concept no organization can stand and thrive. Moreover, monks and nuns must have a role in the social uplift for the good of society and for their own good. Swami Vivekananda has integrated karma yoga with jnana yoga and bhakti yoga, not only for monastics but for householders as well. With this Swamiji has opened the doors to liberation for everyone—rich or poor, learned or illiterate, man or woman. This religion of *seva*, service, is also in harmony with the secular outlook of today's India, as it does not disturb the theology of any religion or sect. Besides, this attitude of spiritualizing every activity does not go against the scientific spirit of the modern age; it is a qualitative and quantitative upsurge without any conflict or confusion.

Swamiji translated into practice Sri Ramakrishna's teaching of '*Shiva jnane jiva seva*; serve the jiva taking it to be Shiva'. Hence, karma yoga is valued today not because it is just action, but

because it can lead one to the highest spiritual goal, and is equally applicable to individuals as well as organizations. Sri Ramakrishna himself practised karma yoga. He said: 'I have practised all kinds of sadhana: jnanayoga, karmayoga, and bhaktiyoga.'<sup>7</sup> The avatara of the age comes to show the path to God realization and also the appropriate sadhana for the majority of people. And as he has practised what he has preached, his example becomes the standard for all of us to emulate. Swamiji also says: 'Karma-Yoga is the attaining through unselfish work of that freedom which is the goal of all human nature. Every selfish action, therefore, retards our reaching the goal, and every unselfish action takes us towards the goal; that is why the only definition that can be given of morality is this: *That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral.*'<sup>8</sup>

Swamiji gave us the dynamics of spiritualizing work. Speaking to the monks of Belur Math on 19 January 1899, he said:

I shall speak to you in brief about a few things which I should like you to carry into practice. First, we have to understand the ideal, and then the methods by which we can make it practical. Those of you who are Sannyasins must try to do good to others, for Sannyasa means that. ... Worldly people love life. The Sannyasin is to love death. Are we to commit suicide then? Far from it. ... What is the love of death then? We must die, that is certain; let us die then for a good cause. Let all your actions—eating, drinking, and everything that we do—tend towards the sacrifice of our self. ... Then as to the methods of carrying the ideal into practical life. First, we have to understand that we must not have any impossible ideal. An ideal which is too high makes a nation weak and degraded. ... On the other hand, too much practicality is also wrong. If you have not even a little imagination, if you have no ideal to guide you, you are simply a brute. So we must not lower our ideal, neither are we to lose sight of practicality. We

must avoid the two extremes. In our country, the old idea is to sit in a cave and meditate and die. To go ahead of others in salvation is wrong. One must learn sooner or later that one cannot get salvation if one does not try to seek the salvation of his brothers. You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now, and the next moment you must be ready to go and cultivate these fields (Swamiji said, pointing out the meadows of the Math). You must be prepared to explain the difficult intricacies of the Shastras now, and the next moment to go and sell the produce of the fields in the market. You must be prepared for all menial services, not only here, but elsewhere also' (3.446-7).

This is the ideal and practical scope of spiritualized service in monastic life. With this ideal Swamiji showed the way of spiritualizing not only the actions performed by an individual, but also by an organization and by the whole society. These words and advice of spiritualizing work were followed in letter and spirit by his brother disciples, one of whom was Swami Akhandananda. He showed how effective this method is and opened a new chapter in the life of the country. The swami reminisced: 'Early one morning I washed my hands and feet in the Ganges and was approaching the bazar when I discovered a Muslim girl of about fourteen, clad in dirty rags, weeping bitterly. She held at her waist an earthen pitcher, the bottom of which had given way.' When the Swami inquired the cause of her grief, she said: 'Father, there is famine, and we have nothing at home to eat. At home we have only this pitcher for carrying water and two earthen cooking pots. There is no second vessel to carry water. My mother will beat me, so I am crying out of fear.' Akhandananda happened to have four annas in his pocket. He took the girl to a shop and bought

a pitcher for her as well as some puffed rice. Before he got his balance of three annas from the shopkeeper, he was encircled by a dozen children crying for food. He bought more puffed rice with the remaining coins and distributed it among the hungry children. At night he decided to leave that place as soon as possible, because he felt completely helpless and unable to relieve the poor. Akhandananda then started towards Behrampur, the district town of Murshidabad. He stopped for one night at Bhabta village. In the morning, as he was about to leave, he heard a voice say: 'Where will you go? You have many things to do here.' He heard the voice thrice, so did not proceed further. Akhandananda later wrote: 'I carried a picture of Sri Ramakrishna with me. Every day after my bath in the Ganges, I would offer some flowers before it and pray to the Master with tears for the famine-stricken people. Thus I prayed every morning and evening. One day there was a response. I heard the Master's voice say: "Wait and see what happens."'

It is over one hundred years and we still bear witness to Sri Ramakrishna's words and Swamiji's encouragement to spiritualize all our activities.



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# ***Education for Enablement***

**Pravrajika Brahmaprana**

**W**HAT IS education for enablement? Is it simply a bread-winning education, or is it something more? Does it depend on the amount of money taxpayers spend per student, which can provide smaller classrooms with a lower teacher-student ratio, better textbooks, and high-tech audio-visual aids, or does it depend on some other factors?

When I look back at my own education, I realize it began with my parents—when they first aroused my imagination with their bedtime stories and introduced me to the world of books at the local library as well as to creative genius at art museums and concerts. The education that enabled and inspired me most came from my parents and teachers, who taught me not what to believe but *how* to learn, and not what to think but *how* to think.

## ***The Role of Teachers and Parents***

Today the US is losing ground in harvesting one of its greatest natural resources—its young minds. It is the wealthiest nation in the

world—it rates fifth in its spending per student, and its classes are smaller than ever. Yet it scores only 21st out of 30 countries in science literacy and 25th out of 30 in math. In 2009 69% of its eighth-graders scored below proficient reading.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps we can best identify an education that enables when we understand what is disabling the US education. Recent educational studies and neuroscience research point to three disturbing causes, which are now surfacing in other countries as well. The US is witnessing a growing number of disinterested or disengaged parents, whose family time is increasingly diverted to managing double-income jobs and lifestyles rather than taking a proactive interest in their children's education. Second, neuroscientists are now finding that increased daily hours of media input—whether via television, iPods, the Internet, or cell phones—are, in fact, rewiring our brain and, in some cases, short-circuiting and scrambling its cognitive processing ability. Third, too many of today's teachers simply cannot or do not inspire learning.

Educationists tell us that future teachers need better mentoring by experienced teachers, better training in universities, and better teaching methods<sup>2</sup>—which are basic educational goals for any country in the world. However, there is an even greater universal need: the teachers' need for a value-based ethic to *serve*, without which they will never be motivated to connect with students or students' parents, nor will they ever possess the passion or idealism it takes to awaken excellence in their students.<sup>3</sup> Stephen Covey, author of America's National Bestseller, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*, gave a telling example of how teachers' faulty perceptions of their students either disabled or enabled their capacity to teach effectively and, subsequently, their students' ability to learn. Covey related a case in which accidentally a UK school system's computer was programmed incorrectly.

In academic terms it labeled a class of 'bright' kids 'dumb' kids and a class of supposedly 'dumb' kids 'bright'. And that computer report was the primary criterion that created the teachers' paradigms about their students at the beginning of the year.

When the administration finally discovered the mistake five and a half months later, they decided to test the kids again without telling anyone what had happened. And the results were amazing. The 'bright' kids had gone down significantly in IQ test points. They had been seen and treated as mentally limited, uncooperative, and difficult to teach. ...

But scores in the supposedly 'dumb' group had gone up. The teachers had treated them as though they were bright, and their energy, their hope, their optimism, their excitement had reflected high individual expectations and worth for those kids.<sup>4</sup>

Within a few weeks, when the teachers saw

that the so-called 'bright' students were not learning, they assumed it was because of their faulty teaching methods. So they became proactive and adjusted their methods to be more effective (*ibid.*).

Though teachers play a crucial role in every student's education, often it is the time before a child enters school—or during its after-school hours—that determine its scholastic motivation and development. Literacy research recognizes parents as our first teachers and shows that those parents who read to their young children not only promote their language acquisition and literacy development, but their later achievement in reading comprehension and overall success in school as well.<sup>5</sup> That is why literacy organizations recommend the need for a literacy-rich home environment with a family library and parents that engage with their children in 'conversations that count'—beginning with one-to-one sessions with the language of smiles and other facial gestures to stimulate and enforce their infant's efforts to communicate with its first babbles and then early words. Studies show that when parents proactively engage with their children in these early conversations, by the time they enter preschool, 'they know a lot about language, because the parents have spent hours listening, talking, reading, and writing with them'.<sup>6</sup>

Another crucial element of a literacy-rich home is avoiding over-exposure to television, especially before the age of two. Child development studies show that the first two years of a child's neurological development is a critical time for learning language. 'Language is only learned through interaction with others,' literacy organizations such as Raise Smart Kids explain, 'not by passive listening to TV. [A] kid learns to talk by mimicking adult language. He learns from the adults' simplified but correctly pronounced speech.'<sup>7</sup> If these parenting measures

are not followed, the child's language development is invariably delayed or impaired.

Two parents living in the south-west of the US who desperately wanted children were finally able to have twins late in life. But their professional careers were so demanding that they had to hire a nanny to look after their infants. By two years of age the twins were exhibiting autistic tendencies: they did not speak and they displayed repetitive and self-medicating behaviours. Dr Maria Denney, a professional in the field of child development at the University of Florida, was asked to intervene. Dr Denney noted that both parents worked full time, and when they came home from work in the evening they were usually so exhausted that it was often more convenient for them to turn on the television to occupy their twins' attention than to actively engage in play with them. This stop-gap arrangement freed the parents to complete their household tasks, but even so, their busy schedules often pre-empted their time to read bedtime stories to their sons.

Dr Denney set to work. She first recommended a speech language therapist—not only for the twins' language development, but also to support the parents and their nanny in their interactions with the twins. Next, she recommended that 'educational techniques should be embedded in naturally occurring routines and activities of the family's life, while utilizing natural reinforcers (preferred people, objects, activities) in the family's home and community.' Third, she encouraged the parents to follow their sons' lead and communicative cues. She added, 'I would suggest ignoring any negative behaviors and giving praise for any attempts with preferred behaviors.' Again, Denney emphasized how important it was 'to provide concrete choices to the twins during naturally occurring routines and activities of the family (i.e., during mealtime, playtime, etc.).' Her fourth recommendation

was reading to the twins. Dr Denney explained: 'Build into your daily routine shared book reading at bedtime each evening with your sons.' 'Have high interest books written at their age level available for the boys to choose to have read to them at bedtime. It would also be great if you could take your sons to the library for an outing to seek more books of their interests.' Finally, Dr Denney recommended that the parents 'seek out support from other families'. She explained that 'parents report the benefits of speaking to other parents with similar experiences.'<sup>8</sup>

What was the outcome? The twins began to speak and recite their ABCs and numbers within nine months. This anecdotal study shows how crucial it is for teachers to remain observant and constructive, proactive, and all-inclusive in their interventions with students *and* their parents. Dr Denney's exemplary attitude of service—her skilled and thorough evaluation and resourceful solutions—inspired support from the parents and an aspiration to learn from the twins.

### **A Values-based Ethic**

Teachers who possess a values-based ethic to serve can lift the bar of education to a very high level. Swami Vivekananda, one of India's great world teachers, introduced that ideal when he stated: 'We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet.'

The swami had undoubtedly based his educational values on the Vedanta paradigm of the innate divinity within all—and how best his fellow countrymen and -women could arouse and access that paradigm of self-development through education. But even an atheist can appreciate and opt for an education of lasting value that bypasses the development of a mere personality ethic, as exemplified in Dale Carnegie's book

*How to Win Friends and Influence People.* The personality ethic—which is based on communication skills, influence strategies, and positive thinking—is no doubt beneficial, but provides only secondary traits. Instead, Vivekananda advocated an education that builds a strong character ethic, which comes only from core principles and brings a lasting and transformative effect.

Stephen Covey endorses the character ethic. He defines principles as ‘guidelines for human conduct that are proven to have enduring, permanent value. They’re fundamental. They’re essentially unarguable because they are self-evident.’<sup>10</sup> Principles—such as fairness, honesty, human dignity, and service—are the foundation upon which values and measures of integrity are based (34). Therefore, unlike the social techniques and quick fixes that a personality ethic touts, wherein underlying problems can resurface, a character ethic works from the inside out—from principle to value. It determines not what we speak, but what we *are*.

As teachers we may well ask: What is *our* central principle? Are we self-centred, spouse-centred, family-centred, money-centred, work- or possession-centred, friend- or even nation-centred? Or are we Spirit-centred? (125–6). Whatever our core principle is will ultimately refashion and define us. In other words, *how* we perceive our self, determines *how* we see the world. Everything is filtered through that lens, our paradigm. The word ‘paradigm’ is generally used today to mean ‘a model, theory, perception, assumption, or frame of reference,’ Covey explains. ‘In the more general sense, it’s the way we “see” the world—not in terms of our visual sense of sight, but in terms of perceiving, understanding, interpreting’ (23). The greater our centre is, the deeper our insight and the more expansive is our capacity to understand. From our core principles flow all our values, attitudes, and behaviours.

Not only did Vivekananda stress the need for the Indian nation to raise itself by a character-building education, but he also wanted to generate that education by which one can stand on one’s own feet—in other words, a practical education. ‘The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle of life,’ he declared, ‘which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion—is it worth the name?’<sup>11</sup> Therefore, an education for any nation that is empowering is one that is holistic.

This ideal is poignantly exemplified in the life of Dr James Killian, former president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) from 1946 to 1954, whose breadth and depth of vision inspired the founding of MIT’s Kresge Auditorium for Arts and Humanities and the Interfaith Chapel, at which the spiritual leader of the Boston Vedanta Society serves as Hindu chaplain. The purpose of the Kresge Auditorium and Interfaith Chapel was, in Killian’s words, ‘to make students more human, not mere machines catering to the needs of science and technology,’<sup>12</sup> which at that time was a revolutionary ideal for a school of engineering. How did it happen?

In 1945, after the United States developed the atomic bomb, President Harry Truman summoned the nation’s top scientists to the White House. ‘We now have the bomb, and it will stop all wars,’ he informed them. ‘Where shall we drop it?’ When Albert Einstein heard Truman’s question, he left the room; and Robert Oppenheimer followed. Truman was surprised. The next day the president summoned US military generals to the White House, including General Eisenhower. Again Truman asked: ‘Now that we have the bomb, what shall we do with it?’ They all protested: ‘Don’t drop it on any populous area—only on a remote region where people can see for

themselves its potential for destruction.' President Truman then invited scientists who had actually worked on the atom bomb project. This time when he asked: 'Where shall we drop the bomb?' the scientists unanimously agreed: 'Drop it on a populous area. Let us see what happens.' That night Dr Killian went home, but he could not sleep the whole night. He tossed and turned. 'What are we doing?' he thought. 'We are creating human robots without any heart! No human feeling! Something must be done' (*ibid.*). That was the time when Dr James Killian resolved to build the Interfaith Chapel as well as the Kresge Auditorium for the Arts and Humanities.

### Practical Education

What is a practical education? Does it simply train us for a career that will financially sustain us and our family? Vivekananda's master Ramakrishna did not want a mere bread-winning education. However, Ramakrishna once commanded a married man to get a job, as he was doing nothing, had quite a number of children, and wanted to live in Dakshineswar supposedly for spiritual purposes.<sup>13</sup> In other words, we must begin from where we are. If we lack initiative, let us first try to inject ourselves with enthusiasm—activity, or *rajas*—in order to overcome our disease of inertia, or *tamas*. Stephen Covey calls this 'being proactive', the first of seven habits of highly effective people. He explains: 'Holding people to the responsible course is not demeaning; it is affirming.'<sup>14</sup> Taking

responsibility literally means 'response-ability', the ability to choose our response, not avoid it (71). This is what brings to bear within us a sense of commitment and staying power. And it is this ability to follow through that enables us to manifest excellence in any field or vocation.

Dr Steven Lindquist, voted by his students as the most popular professor in the religious studies department at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, shared with me how he incorporated this value into his classroom. 'Yes, you can all get an "A"-grade,' he assures his students each year, 'but you will have to work for it.' Likewise, Professor Lindquist also works long hours poring over his students' classroom essays—not merely to grade them in order to clear his desk, but to offer constructive suggestions on how they can improve and strengthen their essays. Lindquist then allows his students the opportunity to rework and resubmit their papers in order to achieve the 'A'-grade to which they aspire.

Being proactive, Covey tells us, 'means more than merely taking initiative. It means that as human beings, we are responsible for our own



lives. Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions. We can subordinate feelings to values. We have the initiative and the responsibility to make things happen' (*ibid.*). When teachers can incorporate this value into their classrooms, it translates into an education that enables excellence—which also builds their students' staying power, self-confidence, creativity, and aspiration to achieve it.

Vivekananda's practical model for building education is from the ground up—by serving, empowering, and expanding. Ramakrishna Mission schools first try to serve students' physical needs. Scholarships are awarded to materially poor, though deserving, students, who are taught basic sanitation, healthcare, and physical education in order to strengthen their bodies. Vivekananda foresaw that without proper food and clothing and strong bodies, students cannot develop the mental stamina necessary to learn.

Second, Vivekananda stressed an education that empowers a student with practical knowledge. Today the Ramakrishna Mission runs both technical institutes for skilled vocational training as well as higher academic institutions that prepare students for professional careers. The Sister Nivedita Girls' School in Kolkata, which was first affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission in 1918 and then handed over to the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission in 1963, teaches handicrafts to girls from low-income families, which provide them with useful vocational skills. With this practical training underprivileged women are empowered with self-confidence and a bright future of economic and social freedom.

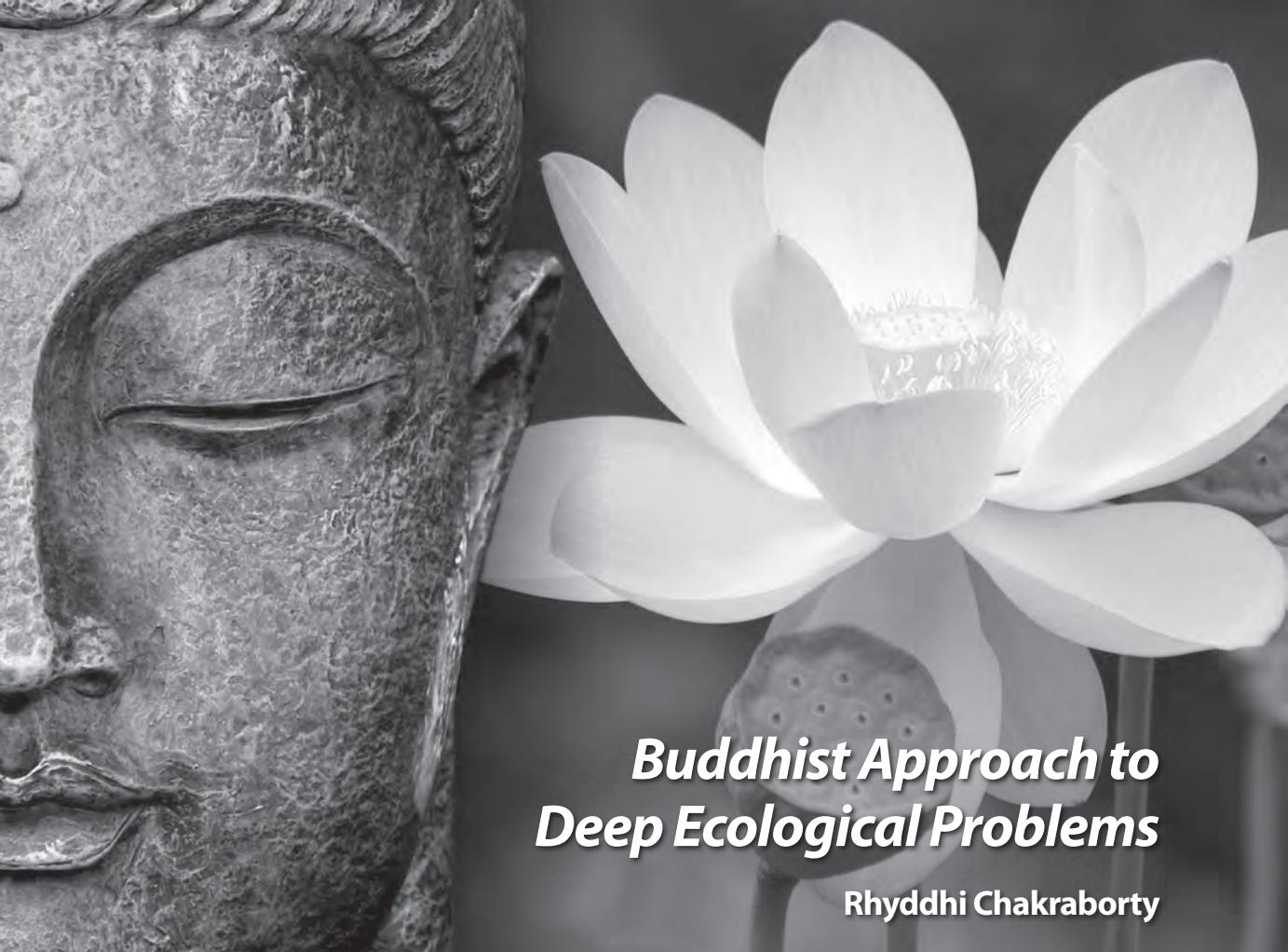
The Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya in Coimbatore gives another example of practical education. It provides at its Vivekananda University cutting-edge vocational training in disability management and special education. The university trains, employs, and produces Braille texts for

the blind; manufactures prosthetics and provides training for the disabled; and offers physical therapy and hatha yoga sessions for children with special needs such as attention deficit disorder, who have responded positively to the calmative effect of these therapies. In this way no student, however disabled, is left behind.

(To be concluded)

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## ***Buddhist Approach to Deep Ecological Problems***

**Rhyddhi Chakraborty**

BY ECOLOGY WE GENERALLY MEAN the study of the totality of living beings and the environment. O P Odum puts it concisely: ecology is 'the study of the structure and function of nature'.<sup>1</sup> Etymologically, 'ecology' is derived from the Greek *oikos*, house, and the suffix 'logy', a subject of study; hence, ecology literally means the study of the house. Technically speaking, it is a branch of biology that deals with organisms' relations to one another and to the physical environment in which they live; the study of such relations as they pertain to a particular habitat or a particular species.<sup>2</sup> This study can be of each and every eco-system on earth.<sup>3</sup> These surface ecological studies come under the denomination of 'shallow ecology', which

is differentiated from 'deep ecology'. These two concepts gave birth to two different ecological movements. The central objective of the shallow ecology movement is to spread precautionary awareness about nature, natural resources, and habitats, but only from the point of view of human benefit. The shallow ecology movement proved to be incomplete and made way to deep ecology as one of the possible foundations of environmental ethics. This discipline studies the moral relationship of human beings with the environment and the value and moral status of the environment and its non-human contents.

### ***Deep Ecology***

The expression 'deep ecology' was first used by

the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1972. According to him, the failure of ecological sciences lies in their inability to show an ethical way of living. Today's society needs not just scientific knowledge but ethical wisdom to deal with the environmental crisis. It is a deep ecological concern that provides and develops this wisdom by constituting an interconnected system of deep experience, deep questioning, and deep commitment. Arne Naess goes a step further and introduces the concept of 'deep ecosophy'.

By an *ecosophy*, I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of *sofia*, wisdom, is openly normative; it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe. Wisdom is policy wisdom, prescription, not only scientific description and prediction. The details of an ecosophy will show many variations due to significant differences concerning not only the 'facts' of pollution, resources, population, etc., but also value priorities.<sup>4</sup>

Deep ecology consists of environmental concerns from the very fundamental level of existence. It refers to existence as a whole. It advocates that humans are not superior to or separate from all other beings, they rather are a small part of the entire cosmos. It considers that human beings are externally and internally related to one another and to non-human entities as well. It thus helps create awareness that there is a symbiotic relation with all beings and that all life forms within an eco-system have, apart from their functional and utilitarian values, an intrinsic value: the right to exist.

According to Arne Naess, the task of shallow ecology is to fight pollution and resource depletion and its central objective is concern about the health and affluence of people in developed countries. On the other hand, the task of deep

ecology is to make a life of committed actions for the whole planet by conserving and restoring all the ecosystems through the reduction of human consumption, by analysing the cause of unsustainable practices, and by making an inquiry into the appropriate human role on the planet. If following Arne Naess's philosophical deep ecology can bring people together with the intention to heal their relationship with earth, then why is it not implemented? Barry Lopez offers an answer in his article 'The Language of Animals': 'A fundamental difference between early and late twentieth-century science in the cultural West has become apparent with the emergence of the phrase "I don't know" in scientific discourse. This admission is the heritage of quantum mechanics.'<sup>5</sup> He explains that this phrase gained popularity in the modern era so steadily that it is also used eloquently in each and every other field outside basic science. Hence, ignorance as implied by the phrase 'I don't know' seemed to be rooted within human beings from the very beginning of this century. And today, while advanced technical skills are helping humans to be more self-sufficient, the nature of ignorance and negligence towards others is increasing. Herein lies the cause of the problems of society, of pollution in the ecosystem, and also of deep ecology. Moreover, it can be asserted that all of the shallow ecological problems have their causes in the deep ecological level—in the form of egoism, passion, grudge, greed, and so forth. This is the result of the lack of knowledge regarding the self, of alienation from nature, which are the inherent negative qualities of ignorance and negligence. Therefore, in order to save surface as well as deep ecology it is necessary to uproot ignorance and negligence, which can be done by focussing on habitual virtuous actions.

Virtuous actions form an excellent human character, guided by which one can bring changes

in others as well. And a religious way of life based on the highest ethics can contribute greatly to the implementation of virtuous actions. Indian religio-cultural texts have vast resources to deal with bio-centric activities through the internalization of an attitude of reverence towards all life forms. It must be remembered, however, that all religions preach against the problems of ignorance and negligence.

### **Buddhist Perspective on Ecological Problems**

Buddhist deep ecological concerns lie in its theory of *paticca-samuppada*—*pratityasamutpada* in Sanskrit—which maintains that all things, happenings, and occurrences in the world are causally related. In this causal relation whatever is cause at this moment will become an effect in the very next moment; this effect becomes, in its turn, a cause. It implies that in this ever-changing world nothing is stable for more than a moment; besides, everything is linked to every other thing. Ignoring this basic truth of *pratityasamutpada*, co-dependent origination, humans consider themselves independent individuals, and in order to protect themselves and to quench their desires, they exploit nature and fail to differentiate between need and greed. The result is a wanton desiccation of natural resources. The *Dhammapada* says: 'So long as an evil deed has not ripened, the fool thinks it as sweet as honey. But when the evil deed ripens, the fool comes to grief.'<sup>6</sup> And, indeed, it is a fact that today's environment has an uncertain future. Buddha understood the catastrophic results of human cravings when he said: 'The gift of Dharma excels all gifts; the taste of Dharma excels all tastes; the delight in Dharma excels all delights; the craving-freed vanquishes all suffering' (355).

Buddha's ecological concern with the underlying concept of *pratityasamutpada* is clearly

understood from this shloka of the *Metta Sutta*: 'Just as the mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him [the human being] cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.'<sup>7</sup> The same message of unlimited love and affection towards nature is conveyed by Buddha: 'As a bee gathers honey from the flower without injuring its colour or fragrance, even so the sage goes alms-rounds in the village.'<sup>8</sup>

How to cultivate this kind of 'boundless heart towards all beings'? This can be attained by following Buddha's eightfold path and thus become free from ignorance and negligence, from cravings and grasping. According to Buddhism, moral actions like non-attachment, benevolence, proper understanding, friendliness, wisdom, love, care, and sympathy are karmic actions. By karma Buddha is said to have meant 'intention': 'It is *chetana*, intention, O monks, that I call karma; having willed one acts through body, speech, or mind.'<sup>9</sup> To transform practical intentions into noble activities, Buddha taught the noble eight habits: (i) *Samyag drishti*, right view, as opposed to *mithya drishti*, false view. It is the correct knowledge about the *chatvari arya-satyani*, four noble truths, which are: there is suffering, there is a cause of suffering, it is possible to stop suffering, and there is a path that leads to the cessation of suffering. (ii) *Samyag samkalpa*, right resolve. To use the knowledge of the four noble truths an aspirant should make a resolve to give up all ill-feeling towards others and desist from harming them, and also to renounce worldliness. (iii) *Samyag vak*, right speech, which consists in abstention from lying, slandering, using unkind words, and frivolous talk. (iv) *Samyag karmanta*, right conduct, which commands one to live according to Buddha's dharma. (v) *Samyag ajiva*, right livelihood, states that one should earn one's livelihood by honest means

in a consistent way. (vi) *Samyag vyayama*, right effort, is the attitude to maintain a constant effort to root out old evil thoughts and to prevent them from arising anew. At the same time, a person should constantly endeavour to fill the mind with good ideas and retain them in the mind. (vii) *Samyag smriti*, right mindfulness, which helps one to remember constantly the perishable nature of things and brings detachment. (viii) *Samyag samadhi*, right concentration; this is the last step to nirvana, consisting of four stages. In the first stage an individual concentrates the pure and unruffled mind on *vitarka*, reasoning, and *vichara*, investigation, regarding Truth—here arises the joy of pure thinking; the second stage is concentration with an unruffled mind free from reasoning and investigation—in it the joy of tranquillity arises; the third stage is detachment from even the joy of pure thinking and

tranquillity, though a feeling of bodily ease still persists; the fourth stage is detachment from this bodily ease too, which results in perfect equanimity, indifference, and perfect wisdom—this is nirvana, absolute freedom.

It is due to human greed, anger, and hatred that the environment is destroyed. In Buddha's words: 'Humankind (*paja*) is bound by internal knots and external knots.'<sup>10</sup> Internal knots are greed, delusion, aggressiveness, and so on, and external knots are found in the environment. In order to uproot these knots, Buddha propounded a set of ethical codes of conduct consisting of *prajna*, wisdom or insight, *shila*, virtues, and *samadhi*, concentration or meditation. *Prajna* is insight into the truth of *pratityasamutpada* and is to be practised through right view and right resolve. *Shila* corresponds to Buddhist ethics and is perfected through right speech, right conduct,



and right livelihood. These virtues are mainly five in number, but depending on cases and occasions they can be extended to eight or ten. The main five *shilas* are: (i) Not to take any life, (ii) not to take anything that is not given, (iii) abstention from misconduct in sensual actions, (iv) not to lie, and (v) abstention from liquor, which causes intoxication and indolence.

Besides these precepts, Buddha also prescribes some qualities of *dana-shila*, the virtue of charity without expecting reward, and the four *brahma vihara bhavana*, immeasurable divine virtues, consisting of: (i) *Maitri apramana*, immeasurable benevolence, which is an attitude of love for near and dear ones as well as for all sentient beings. It includes the intention of bringing happiness to all beings and thereby making oneself happy. (ii) *Karuna apramana*, immeasurable compassion, which entails one to mould mental attitudes in order to renounce one's happiness for the sake of others' happiness. It has the characteristic of joy and involves absence of envy with respect to others' good fortune. (iii) *Mudita apramana*, immeasurable joy, being a feeling of joy regarding others' happiness and wishing everybody to be free from unhappiness. (iv) *Upeksha apramana*, immeasurable equanimity, which involves viewing all beings equally, not favouring some and holding others in disfavour. This fourfold *brahma vihara bhavana* leads one to *chitta vimukti*, freedom of mental modifications. While *shila* inspires one to accomplish good avoiding all evils, *prajna* along with *samadhi*—consisting of right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation—helps one purify the mind in order to grasp the inherent truth of *pratityasamutpada*, *dukkha*, pain, *aniccha*, no-desire, and *anatma*, no-self.

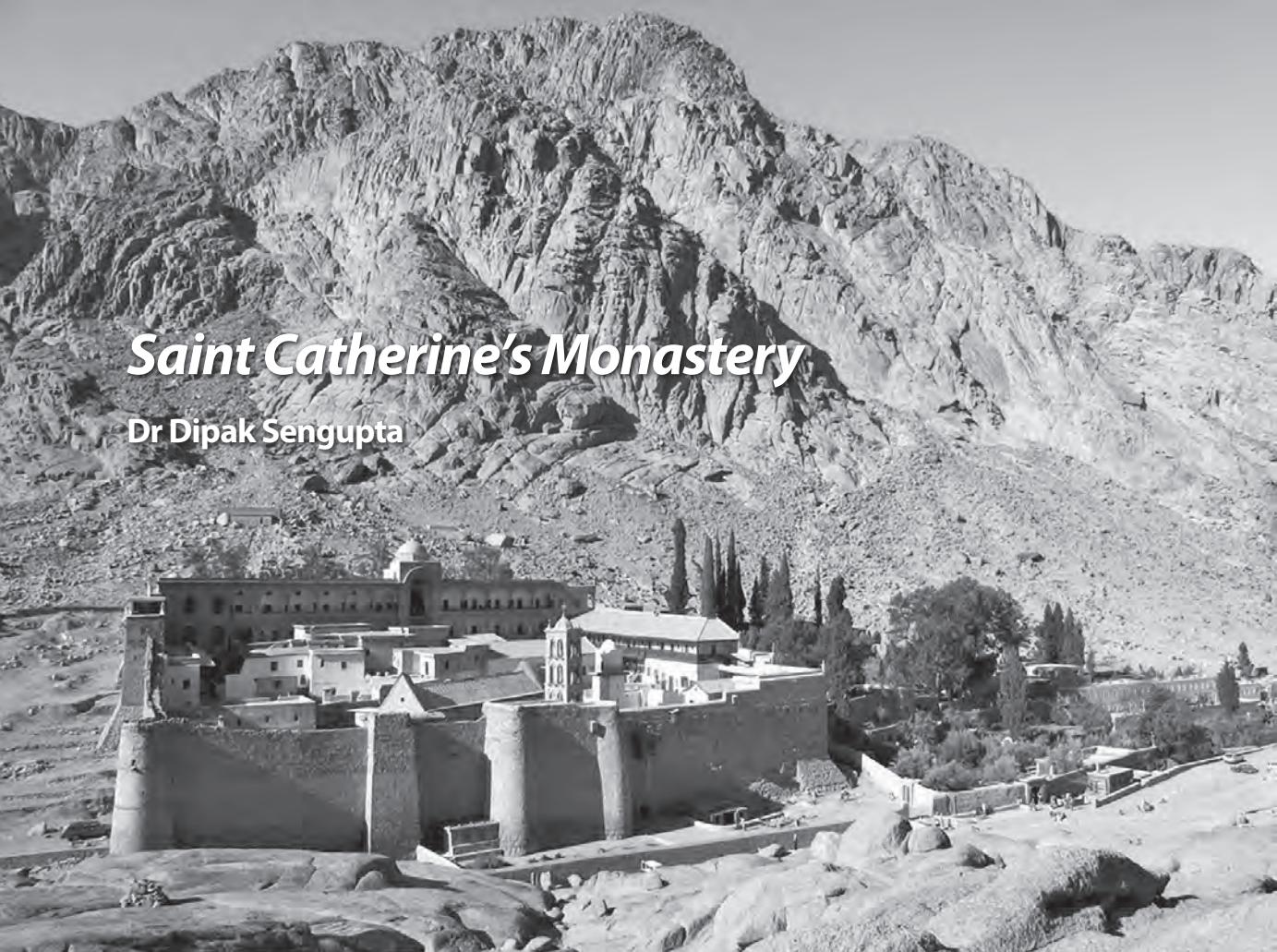
In the context of deep ecology it can be said that Buddhist understanding of reality underscores the importance of ethics. Buddhism

propounds the view that suffering is in the nature of beings that live in ignorance. Therefore, in order to alleviate suffering, one should come out of ignorance, which is also the cause of deep ecology's problems. Again, the view of *anatma* undercuts any clinging to individual gain and loss. And as the idea of a separate self is false, one ought to give up motivated actions that cling to the self. Moreover, Buddhism asserts that mindful awareness of the universality of suffering produces compassionate empathy for all forms of life. They extend loving kindness and compassion beyond humans and animal to include plants and the earth as a whole. A verse in the *Dhammapada* beautifully summarizes Buddha's moral concerns: 'To avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to cleanse one's mind, this is the teaching of the Buddhas.'<sup>11</sup> Thus, Buddhist ethics is said to have sprung from love, sympathy, respect, and compassion towards all living creatures.

In the *Samyukta Nikaya* it is said: 'The world is led by the mind, it is dragged hither and thither by the mind, the mind is one reality under the power of which everything goes.'<sup>12</sup> As mind is related to the body, any mental activity will have its corresponding effect on the body. As a person slowly builds his or her own mental world, and as everything is in the net of cause and effect, any modification in the inner 'psychosphere' will produce an inevitable effect on the outer atmosphere. In today's humanity, whose mind is deeply disturbed and restless, shallow ecology is not enough to make this earth a better place to live in. The individual and collective attempt at cleansing the mind is the key element to address the deep ecosphere; only then deep ecology will be properly dealt with. Hence, the growing importance of Buddhist ethics to answer all ecological problems.



(References on page 610)



# *Saint Catherine's Monastery*

**Dr Dipak Sengupta**

*Saint Catherine's Monastery at the foot of the Mountain of Moses, Sinai*

**W**E WERE SUPPOSED TO CROSS the Red Sea by boat for the Sinai Desert, in Egypt, through coral reefs and seaweeds. But our plan had to be changed due to bad weather; we flew from Hurghada to Sharm el-Sheik on the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. At the airport we met our guide with the jeep. Our destination was Saint Catherine's Monastery, some three hour drive north in the middle of the Sinai Desert.

## ***The Mountain of Moses***

The Sinai Desert, though desolate and uninhabitable, was a land of action throughout the history of humankind. Through this hostile land passed the armies of numerous powers, from

those of the Egyptian Pharaohs like Thutmose III and Ramses II in search of new kingdoms to Alexander the Great, the Romans of Antioch, the Arabs and the Crusaders, Napoleon and Lawrence of Arabia, and most recently the armies of Israel and Egypt. Thousands of Christians and ascetics sought refuge here, in spite of the hostile and unfriendly nature, when persecution became more severe during the first centuries of the Common Era.

Anyone stepping on the Sinai would surely remember Moses, the prophet whose life story was intertwined with the desert. Moses, prince of Egypt—who actually was an Israelite—killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was brutal to the Hebrew slaves, fled east through the desert, crossed

the Red Sea, and reached Midian, a kingdom in the eastern part of the Sinai Desert. There he tended the flocks of sheep of the Midianite priest. Once, while tending, 'he led the flock to the back side of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb [Mountain]. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.'<sup>1</sup> When Moses, out of curiosity, was investigating why the bush was not being consumed in burning fire, God called him from the midst of the bush and a dialogue ensued. One of the things God said to Moses was: 'Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee into Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt' (3.9–10).

Many centuries later Constantine (274–337 CE), the emperor of the Roman Empire who converted to Christianity, was instrumental in declaring Christianity as the state religion of the empire and in spreading its message throughout the continents. Saint Helena, his mother, was enthusiastic about the anecdotes described in the Bible and visited the sites connected with the stories. While in Alexandria, then the capital of Egypt, she heard about the place in the Sinai Desert where Moses saw the burning bush. She was so impressed by the sacredness of the place that in the year 330 CE she ordered the construction of a small chapel surrounding the site where the burning bush had been located—the chapel was dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

Due to its isolation in the desert mountains only devoted monks used to visit the chapel, bringing gifts from all over the Christian world. However, the nomadic tribes of the desert raided

the chapel repeatedly. At last, in 530 CE, Emperor Justinian of the Byzantine Empire fortified the chapel and built a monastery around it. In 640, after the Arab conquest of Egypt, the monastery became an isolated island in the world of Islam. It is said that Mohammed himself granted his protection to the delegation of monks who went to meet the Prophet. A copy of the document attesting the protection can be still seen in the monastery. Because of such protection and its natural isolation Saint Catherine's Monastery was the only monastery to succeed in preserving its enormous and valuable collection of artefacts brought from different countries. In the small but very rich museum of the monastery we saw a short list of countries from where gifts have been received at different times. We were thrilled to find Calcutta on the list. It is named just as a city. India was not mentioned. To our frustration, we could not see what the gift from Calcutta was. Even the monk there could not help us.

We arrived in the village of Saint Catherine late in the day. A few buildings were scattered in a sea of sand and rocky mountains. Our hotel was quite big for this place—with about a hundred rooms. As we arrived, we saw large buses arriving filled with pilgrims. This place is one of the most visited pilgrimages among the Jews and Christians. The main site of attraction is Jebel Musa or the Mountain of Moses. On this mountain God called Moses and spoke to him through thunder. Here he gave Moses the tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, the basic tenets of both Jewish and Christian religions: 'And the Lord came down upon mount Sinai, on top of the mount: and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up' (19.20). 'And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the fingers of God' (31.18).

The height of Mountain of Moses is some 2,000 metres. There is a small chapel on the top, where Moses supposedly met God in a cloud and thunder and received the tablets. The sunrise in the desert is said to be more beautiful when viewed from this hilltop. So pilgrims start climbing late at night to reach the top before dawn. It was too cold for us and we decided to spend the night in the hotel. Next morning when we were having breakfast the pilgrims started returning from the trip. Among them there was a group of South Indian Christians. I was keen to know their experience. In general they were in no mood to sit and talk; all were exhausted.

For one of them it was not worth the trouble. Few of them could not make it in time. Finally, I met an elderly man who was very excited. For him it was an experience of a lifetime. He would cherish the feeling of divine nearness at the break of dawn.

### ***The Monastery***

Late in the morning we started for Saint Catherine's Monastery, which is built around the Moses Bush at the foot of Jebel Kathrina. With its 2,642 metres, this is the highest mountain of the Sinai Peninsula. It owes its name to a legend that says the

angels transported the body of Saint Catherine here after she was martyred in Alexandria.

Catherine, born as Dorothea in 294 CE to a wealthy family in Alexandria, was baptized a Christian. During the rule of the Roman Emperor Maximian, Christians were persecuted and Catherine was tortured to renounce her faith. Legend has it that she was placed on a torture

machine between two big wheels embedded with sharp knives, so that when the wheels rotated the lady would be cut to pieces.

Miraculously the wheels broke before they could turn. However, after other painful tortures, she was beheaded with a sword. Saint Catherine is adored as the patron saint of learning, of students, and of educational institutes. In many of her depictions in painting she holds a book or a quill.

The most touching legend about her is her betrothal with Jesus. Even though she was wealthy and a princess of a small kingdom, she did not accept any suitor to be betrothed. One day an old hermit gave her a picture of the Virgin Mary and the Child. From then on she could think only of Jesus and love him with all her heart. In a dream she went to the top of a mountain with the old hermit. There she met the Virgin Mother,



*'St Catherine of Alexandria with Donor and Christ Blessing,'  
Bernardo Daddi, c.1340*

who, attended by many angels took her to Jesus. Jesus smiled at Catherine and pledged his troth to her by placing a ring on her finger. When the maiden woke up the ring was on her finger. From then on she desired no earthly blessing but longed to go to her heavenly betrothed. To Christians this is a matter of devotion, with a mystical meaning of a close spiritual bond between Jesus and his followers.

We walked up the slope from the parking lot. The monastery looked like a citadel against the rocky mountain. There were massive walls with towers and the main gate was in between. The other side of the narrow valley was also hilly terrain, where goats roamed freely eating the thorny bushes. We entered through the side entrance—the main gate is permanently sealed. Inside, the monastery was like a small ancient village with narrow cobbled alleys, a few residential buildings for monks, chapels, a tower, and even a small mosque. Beyond the walls on the slope there was a garden green with bushes and trees, a beautiful panorama contrasting with the red rocks of the mountain. Built on terraces and surrounded by cypress trees there were different types of fruit trees as well—lemons, olives, pears, and apricots, not to mention the grape vines. We were not able to recognize them; it was a young monk who pointed them out to us.

On the right of the entrance lane there was the chapel of Saint Triphone. This is a small chapel with hardly any light inside. From the entrance door, which we were not allowed to cross, we could only see some faded pictures on gilded wooden frames. On the left wall of the chapel,



*'Marriage of St Catherine', Louis-Pierre亨利quel-Dupont, c.1867*

next to the door and well lighted from outside, there was the charnel house of the monastery. Beyond a meshed frame in the charnel house there were thousands of skulls and bones of the monks who lived, prayed, and died here. Saint Triphone was born in Izmir, Turkey, in 232 CE. Accused of being a Christian he was tortured and condemned to death by beheading. This chapel dedicated to him was built around the fifth century.

There were a number of wells within the compound supplying water to the residents, but the most famous was Bir Musa or Moses Well. Legend says that it was here that Moses met Jethro's daughters, the oldest of whom, Zipporah, subsequently became his wife. The well is situated at the end of the courtyard. Between two buildings an alley runs south. At the corner, where the alley turns left, stands the chapel of the Burning Bush. It is a small chapel, though the most renovated of the entire monastery. We removed our shoes to enter, like Moses did at God's command: 'Put off



*Bush associated with Moses*

thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground' (3.5). The chapel inside was dark in spite of a few hanging lamps. An altar supported by four slender marble columns adorns the site on which, it is said, the original bush had its roots—it was later transplanted outside, under the sky.

Next to the chapel is the church of the Transfiguration. This monastery is under the possession of the Greek Orthodox Church and most of the monks who live here are Greeks. The church is constructed in Greek Orthodox style. We entered it passing through two heavy wooden doors, which were carved with exquisite figures from the Bible. According to Orthodox tradition, the altar is located behind the iconostasis, partition. This is formed of four wooden panels, inlaid and gilded with icons of Christ, the Blessed Virgin, Saint Catherine, and Saint John the Baptist. Above there is Christ on the cross looking down at us. Behind the iconostasis and above the high altar is the most precious treasure of the basilica: the 'Transfiguration of Christ', in mosaic. The event is described in the Bible: 'And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his

brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart. And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with him.'<sup>2</sup>

The interior of the church was richly decorated with gold, silver, and rare woodwork. Suspended from the wooden ceiling with gold stars on a green background there were some fifty lamps and a candelabra that filled the room with golden glow. We could see the ostrich eggshells on the lamp frames to protect them from moths and insects.

Leaving the church we came to the main alley, which ends at the base of the bush. This was the bush that Moses saw burning without being consumed. This particular bush was transplanted from the original one. The base is now protected by a high wall of stone. All the pilgrims were gathered around, touching the leaves of the hanging branches with reverential curiosity. I could not discover the name of the bush.

*'Transfiguration of Christ', at St Catherine's Monastery*



It must be a desert bush; it had twigs and small green leaves. All along the desert road we saw so many bushes, but none was as big or looked like this one. Like everybody else we took some pictures and moved along. This was the bush that changed the history of religion and gave a completely new turn to man's idea of God. This is where man heard the voice of God.

Coming back from the bush we climbed a wooden staircase to the first floor and entered a small icon gallery known as the holy sacristy. We purchased tickets in the small lobby to see the icon collection. A monk sat behind the desk dressed in black and a cap, the typical dress in Greek monasteries. He was surprised and pleased to know that we had come from such a faraway place like Kolkata. He was aware of the Greek Orthodox Church in Kolkata as many pilgrims used to come from there earlier. This monastery is the proud owner of the best collection of Christian icons; some of them date back to the fourth century. Most of the older icons in European churches were destroyed by the iconoclasts in the seventh century, when the idea was spread throughout the Christian world that Christ and other apostles and saints were not be depicted through pictures. Because of the remoteness of the place, Saint Catherine's Monastery was not disturbed.

The monk told us about the library in the basement, which has some of the finest collection of ancient books on Jewish and Christian theology and religion. Most of the books are written in Greek, though there are some in other ancient languages as well. He also narrated quite a fascinating story of an original codex or version of the Gospels. The codex was zealously guarded until 1859, when a scholar from Leipzig arrived in the monastery with a letter authorizing him to take the codex out of the premises for copying it. It went to St Petersburg, Russia, and was presented to Tsar Alexander II. Following the revolution

of 1917 the precious codex was sold for 100,000 pounds sterling to the British Museum, which still owns it. Scholars from all over the world come here to consult the library and do research on various subjects. But we were not permitted admission. I wanted to take a picture of the monk, but he did not permit me. He had to take permission from the abbot to be photographed.

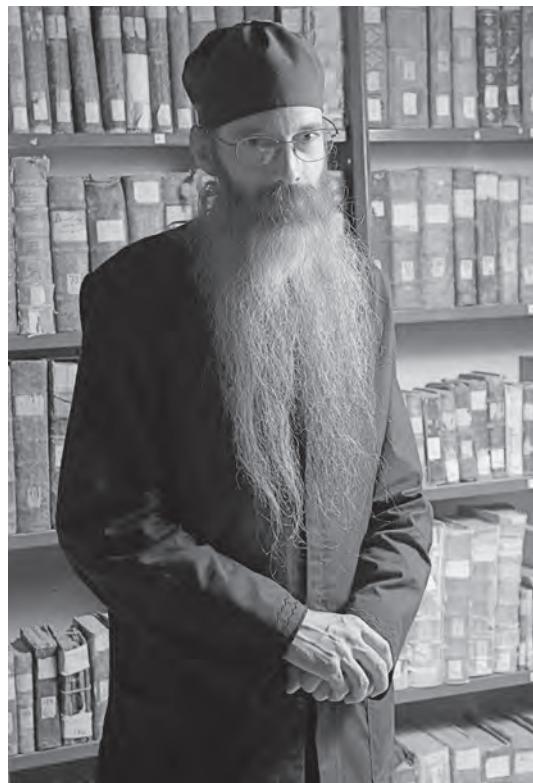
From the golden glow of the icon museum we came out to the dazzling desert sun. Our driver was waiting impatiently at the base of the stairs. We had to leave quickly to cover the long distance to Cairo. As the car drove over the barren ancient landscape we carried with us two thousand years of its history and were silently immersed in those memories.



## References

1. Exodus, 3.1–2.
2. Matthew, 17.1–3.

### *St Catherine's Monastery's librarian*



# ***Simplicity in Holy Mother's Words***

**Pritha Lal**

**O**N MY STUDY TABLE THERE IS a small desk calendar called Amritavarshini, bestower of immortality. It is a beautiful item, not only because it has some uncommon and amazing pictures of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, but there are some equally relevant and pertinent words that make it even more precious. I often flip the pages and each time I find that a particular saying was just what I needed to hear on that particular day. It is as if the Holy Mother wanted me to hear those words, so that I would be able to live that day a little more in the way she intended rather than in my usual scatterbrained manner!

I would like to focus on a few of these immortal words and their relevance in our day-to-day lives, particularly in cases like mine, in which I went through my education and initial stages of my career—as well as my current life—in an environment very different from the milieu that was around our Holy Mother. It amazes but does not really surprise me that her words are as relevant today as they were during the time she spoke them. Even more profound is that the beauty and significance of her words are relevant continents away, with people who are vastly different from me in so many ways, except for the fact they too are children of the Divine and are bound to the cosmos by the same spirit that runs through each of us.

## ***Neutralizing Agitation and Difficulties***

One of the most amazing sayings of Holy Mother to me has always been: 'But one thing I tell you—if you want peace, my daughter, don't

find fault with others, but find fault rather with yourself. Learn to make the world your own. No one is a stranger, my dear; the world is yours.'<sup>1</sup> What fascinated me about these lines was the simplicity with which this extremely difficult concept was presented. Peace of mind is something we all crave for in this world today, and yet we fail to see the solution that is right before our eyes. Whether one is talking politics, sociology, economics, or just matters of home and heart, our first instinct to solve a problem is to blame someone else. I was in the executive boardroom of an office and noticed a painting that had a bunch of executives sitting across the table each pointing to one another. The poignancy of that picture in that room was evident as the meeting started and the philosophy of that artist came alive in the discussion that followed. It was so easy for everyone to pass the buck instead of taking ownership of an issue. Whether I am stressing about an irritating relative or friend who just would not see my point of view, which to me is the 'right' view, or at work trying to coach a manager to develop accountability and ownership, Holy Mother's immortal words come alive in significance and relevance. Her fundamental premise of making the world one's own makes it hard to see fault in anyone, isn't it? That is where we lose out on happiness. We create silos in our mind, no matter what our field of endeavour is. And I guess those silos come about because of previous experiences and so on. But if we could just open our hearts like Holy Mother says, life would be so much easier. If everyone took a little bit of

ownership, a lot of very small non-issues would never get escalated into stress, migraines, or corporate fiascos! This statement alone, coming from a simple village woman of West Bengal less than a hundred years ago is the elixir for a stress-free society today.

Another line that I really like and want to learn to relate to is: 'Many are known to do great work under the stress of some strong emotion. But a man's true nature is known by the manner in which he does his insignificant daily tasks.'<sup>2</sup> What a phenomenal idea! As children, and all through our life, we are conditioned to think of greatness and success in a very stereotypical manner. Famous stalwarts in various fields of endeavour were always the ones who have made headlines, been in the spotlight, and have made a mark that history bears witness. Albeit their contributions to the growth and development of human civilization have been exemplary in one way or another, there is something to be said about those who do the so-called mundane and boring work with a dedication that is as true as it is noble. I recall an incident soon after the infamous 9/11 in New York: I was sitting by my window one rainy afternoon in Utah and noticed two little Boy Scouts come over to our neighbour's lawn with a flag. They alighted from the back of the little pickup they were on, hoisted the flag with full honour and stood in the rain all the time, saluted the flag and then climbed back on the pickup and headed off to another lawn. To me that afternoon captured a moment that in many ways makes a nation great. The single-minded dedication of these two ten year olds, to their flag and their sense of accountability to themselves, could have put many irresponsible adults ill at ease. I know that when my work is challenging, exciting, high impact, and high exposure I am so much more motivated to turn in a

deadline than when I am doing an after-action review or documenting some boring processes. In a world where we live our lives for external affirmation Holy Mother showed us the way so long ago, how to find that validation in oneself, in one's soul, and enable oneself to take a step closer to that divine spark. Her statement is as inspiring as it is humbling. If one truly were to understand the import of her words in this statement, it would be hard to be vain and would be harder to belittle someone doing something less significant. She truly paved the path for a noble existence in this world of exhibitionism, which was destined to arrive after she set foot on this earth.

It does not matter where one lives in this world today, one cannot run away from difficulties in various aspects of life. Whether it is a difficult situation at home or work, unpredictable unpleasantness is a given in our day-to-day existence. And our Holy Mother, in all her divine wisdom, gave us the prescription a long time ago when she said: 'It is idle to expect that dangers and difficulties will not come. They are bound to come. But for a devotee they will pass away under the feet like water' (59). How very true, and if we ponder for a while and think of the divine love she has showered for generations to come, this next statement completes the sentiment of the previous one: 'Suppose one of my children has smeared himself with dirt. It is I, and no one else, who shall have to wash him clean and take him in my arms. To make mistakes is man's very nature; but few of those who criticize know how to correct them' (37). There have been far too many incidents when her love and blessings have been the magic pill that provided a solution in the most unexpected of situations. Oftentimes I have walked into a professional discussion not knowing what the outcome will be or having a preconceived result

in mind. During the course of the discussion I have been bombarded with unexpected information and facts that I was not ready to handle. Yet, if during those times instead of panicking I was able to focus for a single second on the serene face of Holy Mother, the solutions came out from me as if she was speaking them. But knowing how merciful she is, even if I did not focus on her face or recall her name, she has still been so kind as to bless me with the right answer at the right time.

### **Mother as a Sentinel**

Apart from situations that are physically or mentally taxing, Holy Mother has provided in her wise counsel the antidote for any issue. I have had the opportunity to live a good part of my adult life away from home and also start my professional career in a different city from where my parents resided. While staying away from home had its disadvantages, it is also an experience I would not exchange for anything in this world. Simply stated, I think, when one is alone, one really is in a position to understand how strong one's faith in God is. It is so easy to succumb to the different pressures of society and fall prey to various enticements and attractions it provides. I had a very interesting debate with a colleague of mine in Utah. He is of a different faith and a very devout and spiritual person. He made a comment about always being on guard lest he falls prey to the 'appearance of evil'. His faith required him to constantly be on his guard lest he succumb to baser instincts. I listened to him with quite an amazed expression on my face and wondered how one could be free in mind and spirit if one were constantly living in fear of straying from the chosen path. While I understand that introspection and retrospection are key for spiritual growth, in my naivety I also feel that when

Holy Mother said 'whenever you are in distress, just say to yourself, "I have a Mother"' (40), she meant exactly that. Whether it was a wrong choice of friends or my temper tantrums getting in the way, or office politics, or getting hurt by someone who I held dear, each time I have felt any distress, even if in all my vanity I was able to take her name once, she embalmed me with a force field that protected me from everything. It was magic, but in my ignorance of course I forgot this gesture of mercy till history repeated itself. In my debate with my colleague, I told him that while I respected his views immensely, I had been blessed with a Mother who pretty much was going to do all the thinking for me; all I had to do was keep her in mind! As simplistic as that sounds, it is not the easiest thing to practise, but one can only pray to be able to try this path with all sincerity and diligence.

Many people, I am sure, have found answers to most of my immature predicaments; however, the purpose of these preceding paragraphs was not to look for solutions but to make some simple observations on the relevance and simplicity of the immortal wisdom that Holy Mother has bestowed upon us. I was thinking of her divine mercy in my life and decided to ramble on. There is only one line that I feel is a fitting conclusion to these scattered thoughts that encompasses all that Holy Mother is: 'My love to all my children who have already come, to those who have not come and to those who are going to come. My blessings are always there for them.'<sup>3</sup>



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# ***Swami Vivekananda's Concern for Common Humanity***

**Swami Tathagatananda**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

**D**URING HIS ITINERANT DAYS, while at Khetri, Swamiji completely forgot himself for three days in his inspired work of ministering to the people; he ate nothing, he drank nothing. Only one low-caste cobbler noticed this and said: 'Swamiji, I am much pained to see that you have not had any food these last three days. You must be very tired and hungry. Indeed, I have noticed that you have not even taken one glass of water.' Swamiji said: 'Can you give me something to eat?'<sup>11</sup> And then requested the cobbler to prepare some chapattis for him. The poor cobbler did not want to break the caste rules that prevented him from preparing food for a sannyasin, so he said: 'Swamiji, my heart is yearning to give you food, but how can you eat chapattis baked with my hands! If you allow me I shall be most glad to bring flour, lentils, and other things, and you may cook them yourself' (*ibid.*). Swamiji was then observing a monastic vow not to touch fire and told him: 'You had better give me the chapattis cooked by you; I shall gladly take them' (*ibid.*). The poor cobbler feared being banished from the estate of the Maharaja of Khetri. Feeling compassion for the cobbler, whose heart had felt the pangs of hunger that he was enduring, Swamiji reassured him that the Maharaja would not object to his giving food and water to a starving man. The cobbler, whose one thought was to alleviate Swamiji's terrible hunger, threw aside his fears for the moment and served the food to Swamiji.

This incident left a deep impression in Swamiji's mind. Years later he spoke of the cobbler's kindness to Girishchandra Ghosh and added: 'I shed tears of love and gratitude and thought, "Thousands of such large-hearted men live in lowly huts and we despise them as low-castes and untouchables"' (1.352). Needless to say, Swamiji narrated the whole story to the Maharaja of Khetri, who summoned the cobbler to his palace within a few days. The cobbler arrived at the palace trembling with fear, but was surprised to receive the Maharaja's praise. The Maharaja put him beyond all want.

One evening the Maharaja of Khetri arranged for a concert by a nautch-girl to entertain his audience and introduced her to Swamiji. However, the swami did not remain for the concert. Her heart wounded by this apparent rejection, she began to sing with deep emotion the famous song written by the blind composer Surdas:

O Lord, look not upon my evil qualities!  
Thy name, O Lord, is Same-sightedness,  
Make of us both the same Brahman!

One piece of iron is in the Image  
in the Temple  
And another, the knife in the hand  
of the butcher  
But when they touch the philosopher's stone  
Both alike turn to gold!

One drop of water is in the sacred Jumna,  
And another is found in the ditch of the road

But when they both fall into the Ganges,  
Both alike become holy.

So, Lord, look not upon my evil qualities.  
Thy name, O Lord, is Same-sightedness,  
Make of us both the same Brahman.<sup>12</sup>

Hearing her sing in that manner Swamiji was deeply moved. The song left a deep impression in his mind: the truth that the Divine dwells in all beings. Although there are several versions of this episode the essential significance is the same. According to the account of Ida Ansell, Swamiji 'spoke most beautifully to her, even thanking her for the lesson she had given him, thus removing the last vestige of a possible spiritual pride, and completing the preparation for his work in the West.'<sup>13</sup> His western disciple Edith Allan (Vijraja) loved the English version of that song and often sang it gracefully, awakening admiration for it among his other disciples in the West.

### ***In Central and South-east India***

The following story was narrated by Swami Vireswarananda.

When Swamiji was travelling in western India, he was the guest of an advocate in Mahabaleswaram. Now this advocate had a baby. It was crying too much and did not allow anybody to sleep at night by its crying. One day Swamiji said to the parents, 'Well, will you give the baby to me? I shall take care of it tonight.' The mother said, 'Well, Swamiji, there is no objection, but how will you stop it from crying? When I am not able to stop its crying, will you be able to do it?' Then Swamiji said, 'Let me try.' So the baby was handed over to Swamiji. Swamiji took it, then put it on his lap, and began to meditate. He meditated the whole night and surprisingly it did not cry throughout the night, but kept silent.<sup>14</sup>

In early 1893 Swamiji was in Madras. Without

fail he would stroll along the beach every evening. One night he was walking leisurely by the seashore with a few others. He saw some emaciated children standing waist-deep in the water and struggling to catch fish alongside their mothers. He wept and cried aloud, 'O Lord, why dost Thou create these miserable creatures! I cannot bear the sight of them. How long, O Lord, how long!'<sup>15</sup> The profound feeling in his voice moved his companions to tears.

Another miserable sight elicited a similar response from him during his visit to Egypt in November 1900. He was travelling with Madame Calvé and others after touring Europe. One day in Cairo he left his companions with swift strides, making it difficult for them catch up with him. He went in the direction of a dilapidated neighborhood inhabited by prostitutes. A few of these women sprawled on a nearby bench caught sight of Swamiji and called out to him with shrill voices. The sight of these fallen women moved him to compassion. In her reminiscences, Madame Calvé recounted this touching incident:

One day we lost our way in Cairo. I suppose, we had been talking too intently. At any rate, we found ourselves in a squalid, ill-smelling street, where half-clad women lolled from windows and sprawled on doorsteps.

The Swami noticed nothing until a particularly noisy group of women on a bench in the shadow of a dilapidated building began laughing and calling to him. One of the ladies of our party tried to hurry us along, but the Swami detached himself gently from our group and approached the women on the bench.

'Poor children!' he said. 'Poor creatures! They have put their divinity in their beauty. Look at them now!'

He began to weep. The women were silenced and abashed. One of them leaned forward and kissed the hem of the robe, murmuring brokenly in Spanish, 'Hambre [*sic*] de Dios, hambre [*sic*]



*Swami Vivekananda in Madras, 1897*

de Dios!' (Man of God). Another, with a sudden gesture of modesty and fear, threw her arm in front of her face as though she would screen her shrinking soul from those pure eyes.<sup>16</sup>

During his itinerant days a deep feeling of mental anguish and heartfelt compassion for the masses of India was awakened in him. At one point, he did not want to beg from poor people for his own survival. He wrote to a brother disciple, 'I am going about taking food at others' houses shamelessly and without the least compunction, like a crow.'<sup>17</sup> Occasionally, either to strengthen himself morally and spiritually, or to test Providence, or from sheer spiritual despondency, he challenged himself. Sometimes he vowed that he would never ask for food—he would eat only what was offered to him. At other times he did not want to beg from the poor and

deprived himself of food; once he almost died. He was walking through a forest and fell with exhaustion to the ground; still he kept his mind fixed on God. That night he saw a tiger coming towards him. The tiger looked at him but settled on its haunches some distance away. He resigned himself to his fate with a marvellous idea that arose in his mind: 'Ah! This is right; both of us are hungry. After all, this body has not been the means of the absolute realization. Therefore by it no good to the world will possibly be done. It is well and desirable that it should be of service at least to this hungry beast' (1.352-3). He felt happy for an opportunity to give his life to save another. The tiger, however, showed no aggression and sauntered away. Swamiji spent the rest of the night in deep meditation. With the coming of dawn he felt that 'a sense of great power came upon him' (1.353). Many episodes of his

wandering days remain unknown to us because they were never recorded.

Before travelling to America in May 1893, Swamiji stayed at Khetri until 10 May. On the way he stopped at the Abu Road station to spend the night. Swamis Turiyananda and Brahmananda were also there. As he parted from them for his great mission, he placed both hands on his heart and said with deep fervour and sorrow to Turiyananda: 'Haribhai, I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion. ... But my heart has expanded very much, and I have learnt to feel. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed' (1.388). Turiyananda remembered that Swamiji's emotion was so intense that his whole body shook before he became silent. He emerged tearfully with a long sigh, his heart overwhelmed with sorrow. Turiyananda wrote: 'Can you imagine what passed through my mind on hearing the Swami speak thus? Are not these, I thought, the very words and feelings of Buddha? ... I could clearly perceive that the sufferings of humanity were pulsating in the heart of Swamiji: his heart was a huge cauldron in which the sufferings of mankind were being made into a healing balm' (*ibid.*). 'And I remembered that a long time before, when he had gone to Bodh Gaya to meditate under the Bodhi tree, he had had a vision of Lord Buddha, who entered into his body. ... I could clearly see that the whole suffering of humanity had penetrated his palpitating heart.'<sup>18</sup>

The following dialogue between Swamiji and Turiyananda took place at Balaram Mandir in Calcutta, after Swamiji's return from his first journey to America:

I came to see Swamiji and found him walking alone on the veranda lost in such deep thought that he did not perceive my arrival. I kept quiet, lest I should interrupt his reverie. After some time Swamiji, with tears rolling down his

cheeks, began to hum a well-known song of Mirabai. Then, with his face in his hands and leaning on the railings, he sang in anguished tones, 'Oh, nobody understands my sorrow! Nobody understands my sorrow ... No one but the sufferer knows the pangs of sorrow!'

His voice pierced my heart like an arrow, moving me to tears. Not knowing the cause of Swamiji's sorrow I was uneasy. But it soon flashed upon me that it was a tremendous universal sympathy with the suffering and the oppressed that was the cause of his mood.<sup>19</sup>

### **From the US**

On 13 September 1893 Swamiji had just captured the hearts and minds of thousands of people with his thrilling words on universal religion for the first time at the World's Parliament of Religions. Still, Swamiji felt anxious:

As he retired the first night and lay upon his bed, the terrible contrast between poverty-stricken India and opulent America oppressed him. He could not sleep for pondering over India's plight. The bed of down seemed to be a bed of thorns. The pillow was wet with his tears. He went to the window and gazed out into the darkness until he was well-nigh faint with sorrow. At length, overcome with emotion, he fell to the floor, crying out, 'O Mother, what do I care for name and fame when my motherland remains sunk in utmost poverty! To what a sad pass have we poor Indians come when millions of us die for want of a handful of rice, and here they spend millions of rupees upon their personal comforts! Who will raise the masses in India! Who will give them bread? Show me, O Mother, how I can help them!' (1.439).

Alasinga Perumal from Madras was devoted to Swamiji and helped him in two important ways: he raised funds for Swamiji's journey to America and published the *Brahmavadin*, a journal that contributed to spreading Swamiji's

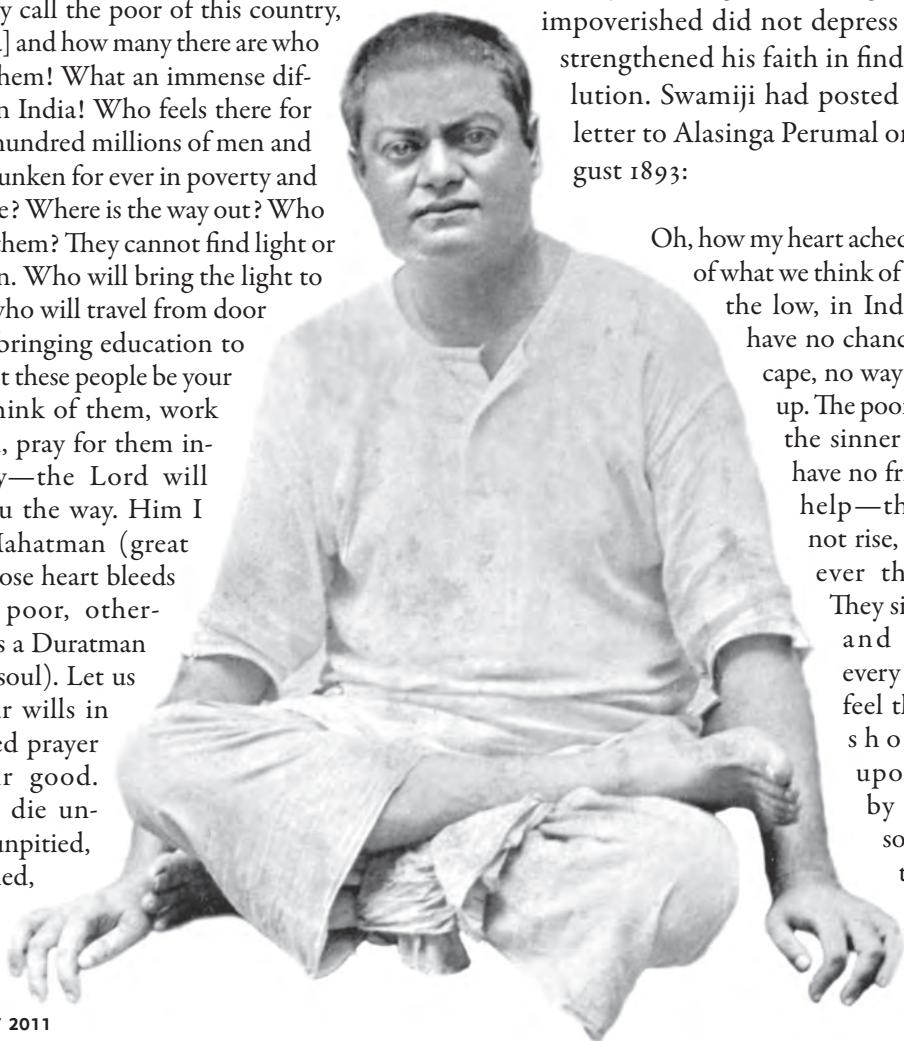
message and ideals. Later Alasinga became the journal's assistant editor. After Swamiji returned to India from America Alasinga travelled with him to Calcutta and Darjeeling. Before Alasinga died in 1909 'Swamiji had written him no less than forty-one letters.'<sup>20</sup> One of these letters is dated 1894 and was posted from Chicago. The letter speaks for itself:

Let each one of us pray day and night for the downtrodden millions in India who are held fast by poverty, priestcraft and tyranny—pray day and night for them. I care more to preach religion to them than to the high and the rich. I am no metaphysician, no philosopher, nay, no saint. But I am poor, I love the poor. I see what they call the poor of this country, [America] and how many there are who feel for them! What an immense difference in India! Who feels there for the two hundred millions of men and women sunken for ever in poverty and ignorance? Where is the way out? Who feels for them? They cannot find light or education. Who will bring the light to them—who will travel from door to door bringing education to them? Let these people be your God—think of them, work for them, pray for them incessantly—the Lord will show you the way. Him I call a Mahatman (great soul) whose heart bleeds for the poor, otherwise he is a Duratman (wicked soul). Let us unite our wills in continued prayer for their good. We may die unknown, unpitied, unbewailed, without

accomplishing anything—but not one thought will be lost. It will take effect, sooner or later. My heart is too full to express my feeling; you know it, you can imagine it. So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them! I call those men who strut about in their finery, having got all their money by grinding the poor, wretches, so long as they do not do anything for those two hundred millions who are now no better than hungry savages! We are poor, my brothers, we are nobodies, but such have been always the instruments of the Most High. The Lord bless you all.<sup>21</sup>

Swamiji's feeling for the degraded and impoverished did not depress him—it strengthened his faith in finding a solution. Swamiji had posted another letter to Alasinga Perumal on 20 August 1893:

Oh, how my heart ached to think of what we think of the poor, the low, in India. They have no chance, no escape, no way to climb up. The poor, the low, the sinner in India have no friends, no help—they cannot rise, try however they may. They sink lower and lower every day, they feel the blows showered upon them by a cruel society and they do not



know whence the blow comes. They have forgotten that they too are men. And the result is slavery. Thoughtful people within the last few years have seen it, but unfortunately laid it at the door of the Hindu religion, and to them, the only way by bettering it is by crushing this grandest religion of the world. Hear me, my friend, I have discovered the secret through the grace of the Lord. Religion is not at fault. On the other hand, your religion teaches you that every being is only your own self multiplied. But it was the want of practical application, the want of sympathy—the want of heart. The Lord once more came to you as Buddha and taught you how to feel, how to sympathise with the poor, the miserable, the sinner, but you heard Him not (5.14).

I have travelled twelve years with this load in my heart and this idea in my head. I have gone from door to door of the so-called rich and great. With a bleeding heart I have crossed half the world to this strange land, seeking for help. The Lord is great. I know He will help me. I may perish of cold or hunger in this land, but I bequeath to you, young men, this sympathy, this struggle for the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed. Go now this minute to the temple of Parthasarathi, and before Him who was friend to the poor and lowly cowherds of Gokula, who never shrank to embrace the Pariah Guhaka, who accepted the invitation of a prostitute in preference to that of the nobles and saved her life in His incarnation as Buddha—yea, down on your faces before Him, and make a great sacrifice, the sacrifice of a whole life for them, for whom He comes from time to time, whom He loves above all, the poor, the lowly, the oppressed. Vow, then, to devote your whole lives to the cause of the redemption of these three hundred millions, going down and down every day (5.16–17).

His preaching in the States was no easy matter. Americans gave a mixed reception to Swamiji's message of spiritual unity and the

divinity of man. He was either applauded or denounced, according to the marvellous or terrible aspects of western thinking. On the one hand, great open-minded thinkers and scientists of his time lauded him. On the other, the dogmatic, mean-spirited, and die-hard prejudiced people condemned him. Still others with vested interests gave him a hard time. Swamiji was well aware of the potential threat to his life. By one account, during a dinner in Detroit there was even an attempt to put an end to his life by poisoning his coffee. However, as he raised the cup to his lips he suddenly had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna alongside him saying: 'Don't drink! That is poison!'<sup>22</sup> The incident almost forced him to remark later: 'It struck me more than once that I should have to leave my bones on foreign shores, owing to the prevalence of religious intolerance.'<sup>23</sup>

(To be concluded)

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# Significance of the Term Putra in Vedic Literature

Kamalika Mazumder

(Continued from the previous issue)

## Putra in the Krishna Yajur Veda

**B**HUVANASPATI, Lord of the universe, is a favourite of the *divasputrāḥ*, luminous sphere's children.<sup>45</sup> Like in the Atharva Veda, in the Yajur Veda too Agni is considered the *putra* of the rishis (1.3.7.3). As the father protects the child, so Agni is asked to protect his worshipper (1.3.14.4). In a hymn in which Garhapatya Agni is requested to be kindled for a hundred years, a *brahmavarcasi putra*, a child of spiritual splendour, is desired (1.7.6.4–5). *Putra* is also applicable to the unborn child, whereas the name of the child has to be given after it is born (*ibid.*). In another hymn a *putra* is purified with the splendour of Gayatri, and twelve potsherds are given to Vaishvanara after its birth (2.2.5.5). Prayers are offered to Soma for children and for attaining happiness (2.3.14.3). Manu is said to have many children, among whom he had divided and distributed his wealth (3.1.9.4).

In all these instances, obviously, children include both male and female offspring. Hence, a verse suggesting that women have no inheritance may mean that the daughter does not ask for wealth from her father after marriage, unlike the son; she does not owe any legal responsibility towards her parents, her duty towards them is only moral. A woman does not inherit her parental lineage; however, she receives wealth from her parents during her youth and also at the time of her marriage. We notice in the Samhita that the father in particular has the responsibility

of transferring wealth to his children. But for a *kanyā*, girl, or *strī*, woman, it was not obligatory to give wealth to her children. This lack of compulsion on the part of the wife to give her accumulated wealth to her children possibly led the later lawgivers of the Dharmashastras to deprive the woman of wealth, except in receiving *strīdhana*. But during a sacrifice it has been said that as the father and mother fulfil the desire of a married woman or a woman to be married, let the Maruts fulfil the desire of the sacrificer with food and children (3.1.11.8). Thus, we see that all these laws or rules were flexible in nature and subject to change as circumstances demanded.

The word *nirindriya* in a hymn (6.5.8.2) has been translated as 'powerless', but it may also mean that the sense organs of the woman are not as strong as that of the man. The impulse and power to procreate was understood to be more prevalent in the husband than in the wife. This must have been one of the causes why the term *putra* in the Samhitas was identified more with a boy than with a girl. After partaking the *śrā*, sacrificial remnant made of milk, the *yajamāna dampati*, sacrificers, both wife and husband, obtain a *pumān putra*, a male offspring (3.2.8.4). Later, it was only the wife who had to undertake this minor ritual to have a male child, a ritual which is now known as the *pūrnasavana samskāra* and is among the sixteen sacraments. *Pūrnasavana*, as mentioned in the Atharva Veda, could initially be performed to obtain the birth

of an offspring of any gender, since it meant the planting of the seed in the womb, but later it became a ritual for obtaining only a male offspring. The ritual described in the Krishna Yajur Veda may have been inducted in the *purīsavana samskāra* of later ages.

In one mantra the father, the child, and the grandchild are hailed with reverence along with the Vedas and the gods (7.3.12.). Indra is believed to give strength to his worshippers, as a father does to his children (7.5.7.5). Like the taut bow-string that stretches the bow, a hymn poetically describes the embrace of a woman. And, as a mother with a *putra* in her lap, so will the bows bear the arrows that will pierce the foes (4.6.6.2.). The comparison of arrows with *putra* resembles a hymn found in the Rig Veda.

### **Putra in the Brahmanas**

In the Samhitas we have followed the use of *putra* and its synonyms reading them as 'child'. But in the Brahmanas the urge for a male offspring gradually became dominant. It is rather a transitional phase in the evolution of the term to mean 'boy'. In the Brahmanas the words are chosen carefully; however, if we juxtapose *putra* with *kumāra*, boy, *putra* still echoes the original meaning of 'child'. In the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, for example, a verse states: 'For offspring are born, indeed downwards from the remote. ... It is thus indeed the father who is (born) at first, then (is born) the son and then the grandson.'<sup>46</sup> Clearly *prajā*, progeny, and *putra* become synonymous and are both used to describe 'generations'. Thus, the more plausible meaning of *putra* and *pautrāḥ* is 'child' and 'grandchild' respectively rather than 'son' and 'grandson'. But in another verse Prajapati makes *putra* the father and the father *putra* (4.9.3). That the father or the male is accepted as taking all the forms, including the female too, is evident in the next verse: 'O Prajapati! None

other than you has encompassed all these forms' (ibid.). In a further description Prajapati declares: "May I create such progeny, as shall be mine in these worlds." He caused a pair by uniting his speech with his mind' (4.149). Then Prajapati became the father of Agni. But Prajapati is also the *putra* of the gods (2.20). Aditi is speech (2.2) and becomes 'the wife of the gods' (4.53, 4.61). Her previous position of the Supreme Mother gradually diminishes in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*. However, a verse states: 'May she [Aditi] bear Agni in her womb even as a mother (bears) her (child) in her bosom' (4.237).

In the *Aitareya Brahmana* prayers are made for *prajā*, offspring, along with *paśu*, cattle. *Prajā* includes both male and female offspring and is mentioned several times: 'Do thou accord us with a thousand offspring and prosperity',<sup>47</sup> or 'may we be multiplied with children, O thou Rudra' (3.1). However, in the legend of Sunahsepa in the same Brahmana it has been said: 'Sakhā ha jāyā kṛpanām ha duhitā jyotirha putrāḥ parame vyoman iti; a wife is a comrade, daughter a misery, and a son light in the highest heaven' (7.3). Further: 'Nāputrasya lokastīti tatsarve paśavo viduh; a sonless one cannot attain heaven, all the beasts know this' (7.3).

Sayanacharya says that as the *duhita*, daughter, carries away the wealth at the time of *sampradāna*, to deliver completely [as in marriage], she only brings misery or unhappiness to her parents. In contrast to the words *kṛpanām ha duhitā* we are reminded of the praise for the girl in the phrase 'me duhitā virat; my daughter is a ruling queen' in the Rig Veda.<sup>48</sup> There we suggested that the daughter was called *duhita*, milker, a highly respectable occupation. If *duhita* is taken as an occupational term, it can be concluded that women did not earn wages in Rig Vedic times. Admiration and respect was given in lieu of wages. But a daughter always did this

work and was so named; therefore, wage earning becomes irrelevant.

One thing that becomes obvious is that as at the time of the Brahmanas grown-up daughters were usually married off, the number of unmarried women slowly decreased and consequently the demarcation between *duhita* and *kanyā* gradually began to disappear. In the *Mantra Brahmana* of the Sama Veda the marriage hymn still called the bride *kanyā*, not *duhita*. Even before marriage the daughter was the owner of wealth, which was not obligatory for her to share with her family. Daughters were mistresses of wealth and treasures even before marriage. If there was a male offspring, marriage was not a source of misery; otherwise it was a loss to the bride's family. The desire for an ideal child through whom progeny will continue is very evident. The desire for progeny became more important than the unmarried status of a woman; the *duhita* was thus a source of misery.

In the *Shatapatha Brahmana* the goddess Aditi was prominently married. The *Aitareya Brahmana* declares a *jāyā*, wife, to be comrade in the increase of progeny and wealth. A question is asked in this very Brahmana: 'Should a man without a wife offer the *agnihotra*?' And answers: 'A man without a wife is only half a man!'<sup>49</sup> Thus, a maidenhood of a woman is unwanted and a *duhita* is misery. One must not, however, lose sight of the existence of unmarried women. Moreover, it must be remembered that the type of children prayed for should not be commonplace but knowers of Brahman, who are resplendent in the *vyoma*, the inner space of the supreme Consciousness. Also in the verse 'Sakhā ha jāyā kṛpaṇāṁ ha duhitā jyotirha putrāḥ parame vyoman iti' *putra* may mean child in general, and even a spiritually resplendent woman is sought after. Such an offspring is a blessing to the parents, who attain the desired

*loka*, sphere, and eternity through their child, a knower of Brahman. A change in the position of the woman and her marriage also led to the enunciation and demarcation of the two genders—*putra* for male and *putrī* for female—as we find in the *Jaiminiyopanishad Brahmana*, which belongs to a much later period.<sup>50</sup> In the *Gopatha Brahmana* of the Atharva Veda we even have the term *naraka*, hell,<sup>51</sup> related to the term *putra*, as we find in the *Manu Smriti*.

That the term *toka* can be of any gender is confirmed by Sayanacharya in his commentary on: 'Mā nastoke tanaye mā na āyau.'<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, Ralph Griffith translates it as: 'Harm us not, Rudra, in our seed and progeny, harm us not in the living.'<sup>53</sup> Sayanacharya says: 'Nosmākāmītoke strīpūm sāmānyavacanadapatye; our *toka*, female and male offspring, are known by the same word.'<sup>54</sup> For the term *tanaya* he says: 'Tathā tanaya tanoti vistarayati kulaṁiti tanayaḥ pumapatyamīti tasmin; and *tanaya* that by which the family or lineage spreads, extends, through the male offspring' (ibid.). So, though *toka* can be of either gender in their general meaning, the word *tanaya* is accepted as a *pumapatyā*, male offspring. But like *putra*, *tanaya* also denotes that the father propagates himself in his child, not only in the son. In other words, the non-occurrence of the words *putrī* and *tanayā* is to be marked in the Rig Veda passage. Quoting the Rig Vedic mantra the *Mantra Brahmana* says: 'Do not destroy the *toka*, child, and *tanaya*, future generations' (ibid.). Or *tanaya* may mean living forever—having *āyu*, life, by the propagation of one's *tanu*, body.

Again, in another mantra, the husband asks Agni to grant him a wife, *putra*, and *rayi*, wealth (1.7). In the marriage ceremony, in the *panigrahanā* mantra, it is prayed that the *kanyā* may have ten *putrāḥ*, with the husband being the eleventh, with all of whom the women be



blessed (ibid.). We have discussed the term *pumsavana* occurring in the Atharva Veda, where it categorically refers to the male Ashvatha tree coupling with the female Shami for the acquisition of the *pumsavana*. Later *pumsavana* became a rite for obtaining a male child.

Let us look a little more closely at the word *pumsavana*, a conjunction of *pum* and *savana*. *Pum* definitely refers to the male and *savana* means pressing of the Soma plant for the extraction of the Soma juice. So *pumsavana* in the Atharva Veda refers to the male reproductive action. But at the time of the Brahmanas, for example in the *Mantra Brahmana*, *pumsavana* was transformed into a sacrament for obtaining a *pumansam putram*, specifically a male offspring (1.4.9). Till then the word *putra*, taken separately, only meant a child in general. Therefore, it had to be qualified with *pumansam* to express the desire for a male child. Similarly, just as in the Samhitas, the word *kumāra* is also specifically used in the Atharva Veda to denote a male offspring (2.3.16). Again, a cow is looked upon

as *putravāsasa*, having given birth to a calf, its *putra* (2.8.1). Here also it is seen that whatever is born of a womb is inarguably a *putra*. The meaning of the word *pumsavana* as used in the *Mantra Brahmana* departs from the original meaning. Some of the sacraments mentioned in the *Mantra Brahmana* were also meant for the female child.

The brahmacharin is a male celibate student, but marriage was held to be sacred and became a necessary sacrament. The institution of sannyasa at the final stage of life did not curtail the status of a woman. In various places in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, a purificatory ritual is required not only for the wife but also for the husband. The age of the Brahmanas was an age of transition in which the urge for a male offspring became more and more pronounced in the minds of the authors, hence customs and rituals were accordingly designed. In the Jain Mathura inscriptions, belonging to the post-Mauryan period, we have the Prakrit words *śrāddhacaro* and *śrāddhacari* for a male and female monastic respectively. This tells us that *śrāddha*, funeral rites, could be performed by monastics irrespective of their gender. Madhuchandas is regarded as the *putra* of Vishvamitra in the *Aitareya Brahmana*. Here also *putra* meant child.

### Conclusion

By following the meaning of the term *putra* as used in sacred literature over the ages, not only are we able to understand the socio-economic outlook of those times, we can also appreciate how from the earliest times Indian society had a common term to refer to the male and the female child. In the Brahmanas this meaning

becomes rather blurred and *putra* is gradually taken as son. This literature marks a transitional phase in the meaning of the term *putra* and is accompanied by deterioration in women's status in general. The importance of the concept of *naraka* is inextricably tied to the beginning of gender disparity in the history of India. To redeem parents from hell became the son's main duty, who remained with his parents throughout his life. For a long time, however, both married and unmarried daughters performed the duty of sacrificial rites. It was when marriage became obligatory for a woman that the concept of hell and redemption from it only by the son degraded women's status in society.

We find workers in the Rig Veda, but not wage-earners. The *duhita* earned gratitude and admiration like her male counterpart, but in later ages the daughter, who received wealth at a young age like the son and also at the time of marriage, was the *duhita* who carried away the wealth from her parental family. When earning wages became prevalent there was only a faint chance of the *duhita* being an employee. From the beginning it was the father's responsibility to distribute his wealth among his children irrespective of their sex. He also enjoyed the riches along with his wife, who was his companion. The desire for progeny decreased the number of unmarried women. With the extensive use of iron and the system of earning wages, professions came to be more and more in male hands. Taxes received by the state or by the king led to lesser concentration of wealth in female hands. The *duhita*, who previously inherited wealth along with the male offspring, was gradually bereft of all treasures except the gifts she received at the time of marriage, later called *strīdhana*. This widened the gap between the two genders and led to the development of a separate term—*putrī*—in later texts alongside *putra*.

As priests became more and more influential over other sections of society, it was they who modelled the economic and social regulations, and even the king acted according to their advice. Slowly, the notion of hell became popular—it is not so prominent in the Ramayana, but during the Mahabharata it became fixed. Thereafter the word *putrī* also rose to prominence. On the whole, when the rights, privileges, and disposition of the son and the daughter became different, *putra* lost its original dual meaning. Our ancestors seem to have perceived that there was no room for the man or the woman overshadowing each other in the field of procreation. A harmony and balance was easily seen in the whole plan of procreation, which they dared not disturb in any way. As the *Kaushitaki Brahmana* says: 'The *Brāhmaṇācchānsin* [assistant to the priest called brahman] is the middle, as this organ of generation; therefore two forms arise, female and male.'<sup>55</sup> They prayed to the gods for a natural balance fortuitous for society, which was one of their concerns manifested in some of their prayers and rituals.



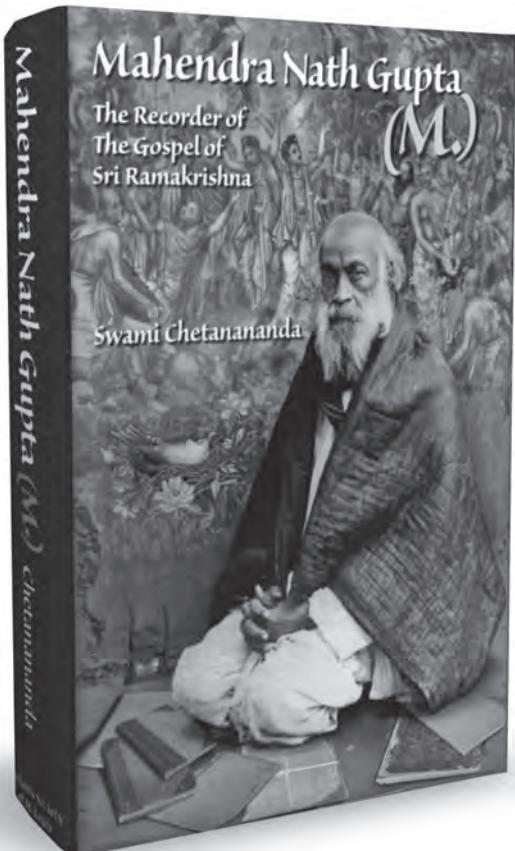
## References

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46. *Kaṇvaśatapathabrahmaṇam*, trans. and ed. C R Swaminathan, 5 vols (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1997), 2.97.
47. 'Rg Veda Brāhmaṇas', trans. Arthur Berriedale Keith, in *Harvard Oriental Series*, 73 vols (Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1920), 25.163.
48. Rig Veda, 10.159.3.
49. *Aitareya Brahmana*, 7.2, 7.9, 32.8.
50. *Jaiminiyopanishad Brahmana*, 2.1.2.
51. *Gopatha Brahmaṇa*, ed. Rajendra Lal Mitra (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1972), 2.
52. Rig Veda, 1.114.8.
53. *Hymns of the Rgveda*, trans. Ralph T H Griffith (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass, 1973), 76.
54. *Mantrabrahmanam*, ed. Sri Ashok Kumar Bandopadhyaya (Calcutta: Sadesh, 2008), 123.
55. 'Rg Veda Brāhmaṇas', 25.518.

# REVIEW ARTICLE

## ***Mahendra Nath Gupta (M.) The Recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna***

**Swami Chetanananda**



**Vedanta Society of St Louis,  
205 S Skinker Blvd, St Louis,  
MO 63105, USA.**

**Website: [www.vedantastl.org](http://www.vedantastl.org).  
2011. 590 pp. \$ 29.95.**

SWAMI CHETANANANDA HAS already behind him an invaluable quantum of editorial work, which remains indispensable to all those who are fascinated by the amazing phenomenon of Sri Ramakrishna's advent and its impact on the contemporary spiritual and other related areas. He has given us biographies of Swamis Brahmananda and Adbhutananda, not to speak of Vivekananda and, in addition, sumptuous volumes of reminiscences and biographies of admirers and devotees of the Great Master. His most recent is *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, a new translation of Swami Saradananda's *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, and the gripping biography of Girish Ghosh: *Girish Chandra Ghosh: A Bohemian Devotee of Sri Ramakrishna*. Among other texts, his translation of the *Avadhuta Gita* remains the most reader-friendly book. Besides, Swami Chetanananda's translation of *Spiritual Treasures*—Turiyananda's letters—has remained a sourcebook of unfailing counsel. Can I say that all these indeed constitute spiritual treasures?

What struck me most about *Mahendra Nath Gupta (M.): The Recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was the sheer appropriateness of Chetanananda undertaking this much-needed biography. It breaks new ground in several ways; it is incredibly authentic, comprehensive, and with its racy narrative art is an outstanding

contribution not only to the growing field of Ramakrishna-Vedanta literature but also to religious and cultural studies in general. This book answers, in many ways, the doubts surfacing recently about the textualization and other related areas of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Looking at the infallibility and acute concern for the truths being recorded, Mahendra Nath Gupta, or M, has, as Chetanananda's evidence marshalled in the book shows, authored a chronicle that would be sheer academic myopia to declare as a mere hagiographical text put together from the 'dialogic processes' of pious devotion. I feel that this biography makes the dominant trend of the hermeneutics of suspicion itself as suspect. The evidence is there in the innate and explicit life of M, as narrated by Chetanananda. The hard granite of suspicions and the alleged omissions in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* certainly receive decisive and, as always with M, suggestive dents.

M came to Sri Ramakrishna as not just a pious devotee but as one who experienced acutely 'sickness unto death'. It brought him to the brink of suicide, the anatomy of which is available in studies of human destructiveness, notably by Eric Fromm. The fatigue of family troubles brought him to the brink of self-immolation. He hardly knew that he was assigned a momentous role in the divine play of the Great Master. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna restored him to his mother when M was lost as a child in the vast crowd that thronged the Dakshineswar grounds—a truth M himself narrated. Restoration to his mother was, for M, returning to his benefactor, who is himself a child of the Divine Mother. Chetanananda tells us that M was a follower of Shakti, and the Master advised him to adopt 'garhasthya-sannyas, which means outwardly performing the duties of a householder but inwardly practising renunciation and keeping the mind on God' (11).

This is an instance of what Sri Ramakrishna himself revealed as his play: 'Whenever there is trouble in the Divine Mother's empire, I shall have to rush there to stop it, like a government officer' (53). One wonders at the idiom of empire: the colonial one—dominant in Calcutta—has vanished, but Sri Ramakrishna seems growing! It is the life of this recovered child reaching Sri Ramakrishna and donning the role of his recorder that Chetanananda offers us.

### **A Shrine in Letters**

The book has forty-six chapters. It begins with M's early life as a householder and quickly introduces his first meeting with the Great Master, offering many details about the disciple vis-à-vis his guru. Other chapters highlight the love Sri Ramakrishna had for M, the last days with the Great Master, the beginnings of the Ramakrishna Sangha, and M's pilgrimages. But for me the most valuable are the chapters on the drafts of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, the history of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and the significance of the centenary of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. We have also details of M's pilgrimages with the Holy Mother, followed by a chapter on M and Swami Vivekananda.

Similarly, Chetanananda tells us that at the request of Josephine MacLeod and other devotees Swami Nityatmananda—M's disciple and author of the ten volume work *M: The Apostle and the Evangelist*—took down what M spoke about the echoes of the Great Master's teachings in Swamiji's views. These are 'a series of articles that tried to show how Swamiji's lectures echo the Master's teachings' (321). These were published in the fifth volume of the Bengali *Kathamrita* as an appendix. An abridged version in English is offered here by Chetanananda.

Among the reminiscences with which the book ends, there are many well-known figures, such as Swami Shivananda, Paramahansa Yogananda, Dilip Kumar Roy, as also Paul Brunton. There is one by N Bangarayya—from Andhra Pradesh, whose biography of the Holy Mother in Telugu is one of the earliest and still in print—that describes the impressions of seeing M. His tribute to the *Gospel* is scintillating:

He [M] has achieved what no other (not excluding even the great Vivekananda) has done. He has built an indestructible shrine in letters to his Master, which shall stand as a Wonder of the World to the admiring gaze of posterity. As Vivekananda put it, it must be that the Master was with him in his unique achievement. The self-effacement, the love of humanity, and the immense tapasya that stood behind the achievement will be adored by mankind forever' (526).

### **'This Play Had just Happened'**

M later told the devotees that the Divine Mother has kept him in the world for the sake of recording the words of this new Bhagavata (242). There is the uncanny detail that M says: 'The Master made me start keeping a diary in 1867 when I was a student of class seven at Hare School' (ibid). This habit paid rich dividends, which started accruing from 1882 when he had the darshan of the one who was behind his many-splendoured creativity. In fact, Chetanananda puts it pictur-esque: 'It is interesting to observe how a drop-out [Sri Ramakrishna] opened a school and a headmaster became his student. It is true that Ramakrishna, who had renounced formal education, opened a school for God-realization in the temple garden of Dakshineshwar, and M, the headmaster of Vidyasagar's school, became his student' (42). The student did such a momentous job by writing the *Gospel* that the founder

of the school of God-realization is, in turn, the subject on the syllabi of Divinity Schools at Harvard and other American universities. The *Gospel* and the Master—the Great Master and Mahashay—have subtle ways of gentle infiltration into academies. Scholars, of course, differ, may even denounce, but cannot ignore the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

As Chetanananda's portrayal of his academic stature shows, M was deeply acquainted with several disciplines: literature and philosophy—eastern and western as also Buddhist and Jain—Hindu scriptures, the Bible and Christian doctrines, economics, science, religion, and astronomy. He did a course in law—compare his scrupulous note in the *Kathamrita* about evidence and sources for the book. From the composite portrait that Chetanananda gives we feel that like the various names M assumed for himself in the *Gospel*, his creativity is fragrant with the flowers of varied gardens of knowledge and wisdom.

But M was free from the dry-as-dust cerebral scholarship that haunts intellectuals. M, as the author says, had 'a soft, loving, poetic nature'. M himself tells us: 'When I read the scene in which Shakuntala leaves Kanwa's Ashrama, I burst into tears. I knew it was a poet's imagination, yet that vivid description overwhelmed me. I wondered at how beautifully the Divine Mother's power operates in this world' (23).

The wonder continued and he realized that his guru was the 'operator'. Sri Ramakrishna, as Chetanananda describes, set in motion what we can call the subtle alchemical process involving the natural transition of M from *rasananda*, joy of aesthetics, to the eternal joy of witnessing the divine play the Great Master himself designed and directed. From tears of aesthetic relish to transcendental imperishable bliss—that was the process. And what role tears have in this process,

the Great Director told M on the very first encounter. There is something teleological about it: when M entered the room in Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna was explaining that tears cleanse a sadhaka from rituals: 'When, hearing the name of Hari or Rama once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform such devotions as the *sandhya* anymore' (30)—'If you have tears prepare to shed them now!' declares Mark Anthony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*; and yes, M knew the art of spontaneous tear-shedding without any exhortation.

That first glimpse led M to observe his Master in every conceivable context. And with what an observant eye Chetanananda has read the *Gospel* is evident when he writes that the *Gospel* is a record of Sri Ramakrishna's 'samadhi and meditation, prayer and worship, visions and revelations, actions and devotion, purity and renunciation, singing and dancing, humour and mimicry, sadhana and pilgrimage, behaviour and psychology, teachings and philosophy, and social and scientific outlook' (10–11). To observe like this is one thing; but to recall, to record, to reduce to the fascinating architecture of a compelling narrative, what do you require? M knew, and Chetanananda cites M's own words: 'I used to memorize the Master's words, and then after returning home I would write brief notes in my diary. Sometimes I would spend the whole night in completing my record. Later I would fill in all the details from memory. Sometimes I would spend seven days completing the record of one day's happening' (242–3). More breathtaking is the fact that 'sometimes I meditated on one scene over a thousand times' (243), to 'visualize' the acts and actors, the background, and so forth of the Great Master's divine play. In short, though all this 'happened long before. By the grace of the Master I used to feel that this play had just happened' (*ibid.*).

### **The Immortal Recorder**

In conclusion, Chetanananda's biography of the recorder seems to follow, as its narrative focus, what Sri Ramakrishna called *bhavamukha*: M is extremely alert in listening and accurate in recording, though he also felt simultaneously an ardent longing to experience, at least get some glimpses, of what he saw the Great Master had experienced. His function was extremely difficult: to shape what is *kanthastha*, oral, into *granthastha*, written. In many contexts of samadhi, for instance, he has to make the *anahata*, unstruck sound, articulate and expressive in language. What is beyond *bhasha*, language, has to be made intelligible and capable of being comprehended.

It is here that M achieved the most miraculous art of 'recording' without intrusion of his own reviews and retrospects. In that sense, a careful reading of this biography convinces the reader that M had no separate self; at the same time, he kept what Sri Ramakrishna called 'the ripe ego' for his recording. The clues are all over the *Gospel* and Chetanananda's biography. M's inwardness and extreme awareness of what the Great Master's consciousness was experiencing gave his record an authenticity of felt-familiarity with that consciousness.

This may appear woolly: Chetanananda's chapter on the Morton Institution and Naimissharanya shows how M blended the academic and the transcendental. It is not for fancy that he incorporated into the syllabus of the Morton Institution the life and teachings of his Great Master! M was so steeped in everything related to Sri Ramakrishna that he even dictated a list of sacred places he visited, including the exact spot where the Great Master fell and injured his arm. The list of sixty-eight such places is itself a crown jewel of the Master's city: Calcutta. The book is enriched by photographs selected with the

author's characteristic quality of making them an integral dimension of the text.

Read Chetanananda's *Mahendra Nath Gupta (M): The Recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and you can no longer read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in the same way you did earlier. On every page the symbiosis of M's memory, recall, and evocation of the concerned events stirs your consciousness with indescribable wonder. If the *Gospel* is an indestructible shrine of letters, Chetanananda's book is a mini encyclopaedia of all that 'Ye know and all that Ye need to know' about the life and achievements of the immortal recorder. 

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

In a world in which much spirituality is contrived, even ersatz, the story of Ramakrishna—India's greatest modern saint—remains a perpetual fountain of authenticity. Entrée into his extraordinarily uplifting world is obtained, of course, via his biography, but also, and in some senses equally or even more powerfully, through study of the lives of those who were transformed by him. Among the latter, Mahendra Nath Gupta—to whom we owe the most reliable accounts of day-to-day life with Ramakrishna—is of paramount importance. This is all the more the case as Gupta (or 'M' as he has been known to readers of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) was not a monk but a married man with children and all the obligations of family. A study of his life will bear abundant fruit for any student of spirituality. We all owe a great deal to Swami Chetanananda for this engaging and meticulously researched account, which for seekers and scholars alike will become a 'must read'.

—Lance E Nelson,

Professor of Theology and Religious Studies,  
University of San Diego

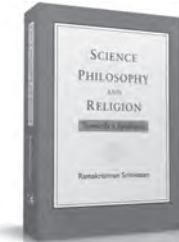
(Continued from page 585)

### Notes and References

1. P Eugene Odum, *Ecology: The Link Between the Natural and the Social Sciences* (New Delhi: Oxford, 1975), 1.
2. See *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 6th edition.
3. An ecosystem is the natural complex of plant and animal populations and the particular sets of physical conditions under which they exist. The organisms of a locality, together with the functionally related aspects of the environment constitute an ecosystem. The word is derived from two words: 'ecology' and 'system'. 'Eco' means environment and 'system' implies interacting, interdependent, or complex. The word was first coined by A G Tansley in 1935 in an article 'The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts and Terms', *Ecology*, 70/6. See also David R Keller and Frank B Golley, *The Philosophy of Ecology: From Science to Synthesis* (Georgia: University of Georgia, 2000), 55.
4. *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Naess and the Progress of Ecophilosophy*, ed. Nina Witoszek and Andrew Brennan (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 6.
5. John Lane and Maya Kumar Mitchell, *Only Connect: Soil, Soul, Society, the Best of Resurgence Magazine* (Vermont: Chelsea Green Pub, 2000), 28.
6. *Dhammapada*, 50.
7. *Sutta Nipata, Atthakatha*, ed. Prof. Angaraj Choudhuri (Nalanda: Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, 1974), 364.
8. *Dhammapada*, 50.
9. Damien Keown, *Buddhist Ethics* (New Delhi: Oxford University, 2007), 5.
10. *Samyukta Nikaya*, trans. (Bengali) Silananda Brahmachari, 2 vols (Kolkata: Dharmadhar Baudha Grantha Prakashani, 1996), 1.13.
11. *Dhammapada*, 179.
12. See Lily de Silva, *Essays on Buddhism, Culture and Ecology for Peace and Survival* (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 2001), 94.

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



## **Science, Philosophy and Religion: Towards a Synthesis**

Ramakrishnan Srinivasan

Citadel, 4/10A Bijoygarh, Kolkata  
700 032. 2010. xx + 293 pp. ₹ 495.

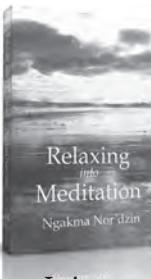
**S**ri Ramakrishna's teaching 'yatho mat, tatho path; as many opinions, so many paths' forms the basis of this book. Various facets of science, philosophy, and religion are explored, while a synthesis of these diverse fields is sought.

The book is divided into four parts: the first three being on science, philosophy, and religion, and the last one attempts to synthesize the former three. The sheer size of each topic forces the author to restrict himself to select concepts. The vast advances made in the sciences, especially particle physics, makes interesting reading. The author clearly shows his scientific background in his approach to string theory, the theory of everything, and so on. Other areas such as evolutionary biology, mathematics, consciousness, and free will are also briefly introduced. The philosophy section is mainly drawn from Vedanta, Buddhism, Vedic traditions, Western philosophy, and ancient Greek thought. Discussion on religion revolves mainly around Sanatana Dharma, though there is emphasis of Advaita Vedanta and Yoga. Besides this, ancient religious traditions like the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Jainism, Buddhism, as well as Semitic religions are also analysed. In his attempt at synthesis, the author compares science and philosophy with the two sides of a coin, while religion is compatible with both. Hinduism and its universality, as propounded by Swami Vivekananda, are well explained by the author, though not quoting directly from Swamiji's works.

On the practical side, the author stresses a return to the concept of the extended family, which could lead to: *vasudaiva kutumbakam*, where the whole world becomes a family. The book is well

printed and a select bibliography should further help interested readers.

Brahmachari Vidyachaitanya  
Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi



## **Relaxing into Meditation**

Ngakma Nor'dzin

Aro Books Worldwide, PO Box 65, Penarth, Vale of Glamorgan, Wales, CF64 1XY. Website: [www.aro-books-worldwide.org](http://www.aro-books-worldwide.org). 2010. x + 184 pp. Price not stated.

It is good to tame the mind, which is difficult to hold in and flighty, rushing wherever it wishes; a tamed mind brings happiness.

—*Dhammapada*, 37

**T**he author of this detailed step-by-step manual brings in nearly three decades of teaching experience in meditation and relaxation. Her first book, *Spacious Passion*, was published in 2006. The author became the first Western woman to take ordination into the non-monastic tradition of Nyingma Tibetan Buddhism in 1989. She clarifies saying that although the meditation techniques in the book have their basis in Buddhism, it is possible to practise these methods without being a Buddhist or having an interest in Buddhism. But long-term practice will inspire experiences that may be difficult to understand from a rational intellectual perspective outside of a spiritual tradition. The author adds that 'to truly discover complete wakefulness our meditation practice needs the guidance and focus of a teacher and a spiritual tradition. Hence I would urge anyone who establishes a long-term, committed, daily practice of meditation to seek a teacher and a meditation tradition' (152).

This book is an introduction to meditation. It introduces a range of methods to explore for someone willing to learn. Its object is to take the reader on a journey of preparation through relaxation

techniques and breathing exercises, and to introduce basic meditation practices. Meditation is a vital skill that enables anyone and everyone to live their life more fully and more happily. The author is convinced that if everyone meditated for a few minutes every day, the world would be a more peaceful and friendlier place. It is hard to disagree with her, especially when she shows us how.

Nileen Putatunda  
A devotee, Kolkata



***The End of Empires: African Americans and Indians***  
Gerald Horne

Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers,  
PO Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road,  
New Delhi 110 055. Website: [www.mrmlbooks.com](http://www.mrmlbooks.com). 2010. 266 pp. ₹ 795.

**A** comprehensive and complex history of two races: Indians under British imperialism and African Americans in the US. These segregated people, then considered economic beasts of burden, had no rights and were stamped upon at will with the ridiculous notion of racial supremacy. The author looks with a fine lens to reveal their little-known common history of brutal exploitation and interactions at many levels.

The interactions among these and many other races helped accelerate the global struggles against the unjust oppression and formed sharp international contours in the political maps of not just America and Asia but of Europe and Africa as well. In this fight other nations, enslaved as well as oppressors, were also dragged into. This conflict threw up many stalwarts and committees both among the African Americans and the Indians. The outbreak of the two world wars fanned the flames even more violently.

We are so used to seeing history from top down and are thereby being misled. This is a history no one should miss reading, as it is told from bottom up, as it should be. The research and references by the author are meticulous.

It is known how the freedom movement in India inspired the African Americans in their struggle for equal rights. But long before this, how the enslaved coloured people of the US were

preparing for it, along with their players, is not well known. The book is a brilliant scholarly presentation of the fight for freedom.

PB

## BOOKS RECEIVED



***Annamāchārya Sankirtanāmrutam*  
(The Nectar of Annamāchārya Songs)**

Dr Samudrala Lakshmanaiah  
K Hanumanthu, 20-9-630 Siva-  
jyothi Nagar, Tirupati 517 507. 2011.  
xxx + 288 pp. ₹ 75.

**F**or more than five centuries the sankirtans of Saint Annamacharya, with their sheer poetry and deep spirituality, have inspired the masses of South India towards religion and social cohesion and are today growing even more popular. These have been translated into English by K Hanumanthu and Dr K Saraswathi Vasudev.



***Verses of the Divine Spiritual Life***

Swami Dayananda Giri Ji  
Maharaj

G C Garg, 99 Preet Nagar, Ambala City, Haryana 134 003. 2010.  
xxxvi + 382 pp. For free distribution.

**S**wami Dayananda Giri Ji Maharaj was a remarkable monk who attained a very high level of spirituality. The devotees who flocked to him have published this book to enable his simple teachings to be known to a wider circle of spiritual aspirants.



***A Dictionary / Panorama of Spiritual Science:  
Ādhyātma Vidyā***

Swami Dayananda Giri Ji  
Maharaj

G C Garg. xvii + 303 pp. For free distribution.

**S**ome of the basic concepts of spirituality are dwelt upon in this volume. A companion volume to the one mentioned above.

# REPORTS



## **Commemoration of the 175th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna**

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated a special exhibition on Sri Ramakrishna at Ramakrishna Museum, **Belur Math**, on 11 July 2011.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda**, organized a devotees' convention, in which 415 devotees took part on 3 July.

## **Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda**

At the request of **Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair**, the government of Andaman and Nicobar has issued an order instructing all educational institutions in the Union Territory to help the centre in conducting Vivekananda value inculcation programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda from 2011 to 2014.

The following centres celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda with several programmes. **Agartala**: a seminar each at Kamalpur and Dharmanagar in Tripura on 4 and 11 July, in which about 300 and 500 persons respectively took part; **Chengalpattu**: procession, devotional songs, talks, and cultural programme at Salayur village on 26 June, in which about 450 persons participated; **Contai**: installation of a statue of Swamiji at a local school, cultural competitions, and distribution of books on Swamiji to students on 1 May; **Limbdi**: talks on Swamiji's message at five schools in Kutch district



*Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji inaugurating a special exhibition on Sri Ramakrishna*

during August; **Port Blair**: a Vivekananda value inculcation programme, in which about 15,000 students from 25 educational institutions participated till July; **Puri Mission**: devotees' convention on 4 July, in which 270 devotees took part; **Tamluk**: interschool cultural competitions on Swamiji's life and teachings and distribution of books on Swamiji on 18 May; **Thiruvananthapuram**: youth camp at Nettayam on 7 and 8 May.

The progress report of the main service projects under the Central Executive Committee 'A' is as follows. Gadadhar Abhyudaya Prakalpa (physical, mental, and spiritual development of children) and Vivekananda Swasthya Parivesha Prakalpa (preventive and curative medical care to children): all of the 300 targeted units have been undertaken; Sarada Palli Vikas Prakalpa (welfare, education, and empowerment of women): all of the 10 targeted villages have been undertaken; Akhandananda Seva Prakalpa (service to marginalized people): 9 of the 10 targeted pockets of poverty have been undertaken.

## **News from Branch Centres**

**Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar**, organized on 3 July a blood donation camp, which was inaugurated by Sri Manik Sarkar, chief minister of Tripura. 88 persons donated blood in the camp.

On 4 July **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur**, held its sixth foundation anniversary celebration and the annual convocation at its Belur campus. Swami

Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, who is also the chancellor of the university, presided over the meeting and gave away certificates, degrees, and diplomas to the students who have successfully graduated from the Belur and Narendrapur faculties of the university.

### **Relief**

**Earthquake and Tsunami Relief** · Nippon Vedanta Kyokai (Vedanta Society of Japan) continued relief work among the victims of the massive earthquake and ensuing tsunami that had hit the north-east coast of Japan on 11 March. In the third phase the centre supplied the following items to the victims through various official agencies: 80 kg of laundry detergent, 60 l of dishwashing liquid, and 2,000 pairs of cooking and serving gloves on 20 June; 900 polo shirts and 400 T-shirts on 4 and 5 July. Besides, the centre arranged to serve lunch to about 600 residents of the community of Futabacho in Futaba-gun, Fukushima prefecture, sheltered at Kisai High School in Kazo town on 10 July.

**Flood Relief** · Continuing its relief operations among the victims of the recent flood, Belgharia centre distributed 32,125 kg chira, 3,200 kg sugar, 1,786 packets of biscuits, 10,000 halogen tablets, and 164 kg cornflakes to 20,273 persons of 21 villages in Purba Medinipur and Paschim Medinipur districts during August.

**Storm Relief** · Chandipur centre conducted the following relief operations among 7 families belonging to 4 villages of Egra subdivision in Purba Medinipur district whose houses had been destroyed by a recent storm: provided 44 asbestos sheets, 760 roof tiles, 155 earthen pots, and 880 bundles of straw to the affected families; reconstructed the damaged wall of the house of one affected family; supplied 82 kg rice, 9 kg dal, 8 kg mustard oil, 100 kg potatoes, 18 kg other vegetables, 3 kg spices, 4 kg salt, and children garments to 2 of the most affected families.

**Fire Relief** · Chengalpattu centre distributed 25 kg rice, cooking utensils, and hut-building materials to 10 families whose huts had been gutted by fire near Thirukkalukkundram.

**Distress Relief** · The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Chandigarh**: 128 pairs of shoes and socks to the children of a school in Panchkula district; **Limbdi**: school uniforms to 195 needy students on 7 July; **Ulsoor**: 75,000 notebooks, 3,000 dictionaries, 1,700 slates, 2,000 geometry boxes, 14,000 pencils, 14,000 erasers, 14,000 pencil sharpeners, and 12,000 pens to 15,130 students of 163 schools and coaching centres at 131 villages in Karnataka from 8 June to 6 July. **Lucknow**: vitamin A capsules to 2,855 needy school children and free glasses to 148 children with refractory errors during the month of July.

**Pilgrim Service** · Puri Mission served lemonade and drinking water to about 30,000 pilgrims during the Ratha Yatra festival and treated 75 patients in the medical camp organized on this occasion; the centre also served lemonade to about 700 pedestrians per day throughout the summer season. **Pune** centre conducted a free medical camp at Pandharpur from 9 to 12 July on the occasion of Varkari Mela, in which about 1,500 pilgrims were treated for various ailments. PB

### **Notice**

According to the Rules and Regulations of Ramakrishna Math, Belur, 2008, 'Ramakrishna Order / Sangha' means the Organization of sannyasins attached to Ramakrishna Math, Belur. A register of such sannyasins and ordained brahmacharins is maintained at Belur Math. So, any sannyasin or ordained brahmacharin whose name is not found in the current register of monastics maintained by Ramakrishna Math, Belur, (not in the occasionally printed list of monastics) cannot be considered to be a monastic of the Ramakrishna Order attached to Ramakrishna Math, Belur, even if he feels like following the life and teachings of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda as a devotee, like many other persons having faith in the great saints.

The Trust, Ramakrishna Math, Belur, is governed by the provisions and Rules thereof.

The General Secretary  
Ramakrishna Math, Belur  
P.O. Belur Math, Dist. Howrah  
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19A & B, RAJA RAJKRISHNA STREET, KOLKATA-700 006, INDIA

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## RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, LIMBDI



### *An Appeal for the New Temple*

Dear Devotees



Shri Ramakrishna movement in Limbdi has started from the Tower Bungalow where Swami Vivekananda had stayed for a few days in the year 1891. The Prince of Limbdi came in close contact with him and was highly influenced by him. In the year 1968 a group of local devotees - divinely inspired by Shri Ramakrishna - founded Shri Ramakrishna Prarthana Mandir and in 1994 it was handed over to Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math along with the present location of the Ashrama. Since then the Ramakrishna Mission, Limbdi is continuing the socio-religious activities according to the teachings of the holy Trio.

The ashrama hosts a dispensary along with a Physiotherapy section, and an X-ray unit. We undertake relief activities whenever a calamity strikes, like the construction of 24 school buildings destroyed by the devastating 2001 earthquake. Also under "Shri Ramakrishna Jaldhara Project" around 60 ponds have been deepened in the rain starving villages of Surendranagar dist. Moral and value education programs for students are also conducted regularly.



Construction	Cost Rs.
Temple	75 Lacks
Vivekananda Institute of Culture	15 Lacks
Vivekananda Gymnasium	15 Lacks
Monks Quarter	20 Lacks
Staff Quarter	10 Lacks
<b>Total Amount</b>	<b>135 Lacks</b>

To celebrate the 175th birth anniversary of Shri Ramakrishna we have decided to construct **Shri Ramakrishna Temple** in the Ashrama premises. Here is an estimate of the construction plans.

We earnestly appeal to you to help us in our noble endeavor. Your smallest contribution will be a great help to us. It may kindly be noted that the donation to Ramakrishna Mission is exempt under section 80G of IT Act. Cheque/Draft may kindly be drawn in favor

of Ramakrishna Mission, Limbdi.

**Swami Adibhavananda**  
Secretary

Ramakrishna Mission  
Station Road, Limbdi—388 421  
Dt. Surendranagar, Gujarat

Ph: 02753 260 228  
E-mail: rkmelimbdi@gmail.com



## APPEAL FOR RESTORATION

Ramakrishna Kutir at Almora, Uttarakhand, was founded at the behest of Swami Vivekananda by Srimat Swamis Turiyanandaji Maharaj and Shivanandaji Maharaj, celebrated monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Unprecedented rains and cloud burst in September 2010 at Almora have caused tremendous landslide, gorges, cracks and land-sinking in the Ashrama. The changed land contour has damaged the temple and other buildings. Engineers have suggested abandoning an old building and rebuilding another inhabitable one.

This Ashrama is mainly a retreat centre where monks, devotees, and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna come, live in a spiritual atmosphere, and get peace of mind. This spirituality is still alive and vibrant. The effect of Swami Turiyanandaji's intense austerities here will remain for eternity. Apart from the continuous welfare activities for the poor people of the hill regions and needy students, this Ashrama conducted relief work by distributing 5000 woollen blankets to the victims of the said calamity and devastation in Almora district.

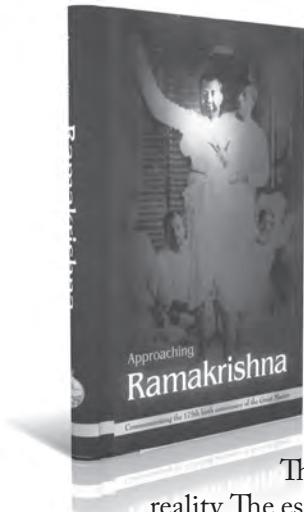
We appeal to you to lend your helping hand to save the Ashrama. The restoration of land should be completed before the rainy season of 2011, and then the repair of the damaged buildings will have to be started. For this restoration project we need more than ₹ 2 crore.

Cheque/Draft may please be drawn in favour of '*Ramakrishna Kutir, Almora*' and sent to: Ramakrishna Kutir, Bright End Corner, Almora, Uttarakhand 263 601. The name of the donors of ₹ 2 lakh and above will be displayed in a prominent place if they wish so. All donations are exempt from Income tax under section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Swami Somadevananda  
Adhyaksha



RAMAKRISHNA KUTIR  
(A branch centre of *Ramakrishna Math, PO Belur Math, Dt. Howrah, West Bengal*)  
Bright End Corner, Almora, Uttarakhand —263 601  
Ph: 05962-254417 • Email: rkutir@gmail.com / rkutir@yahoo.in



## Approaching Ramakrishna

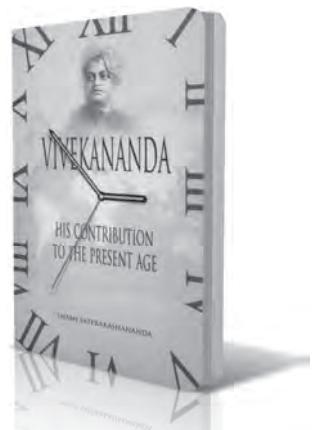
Sri Ramakrishna's heart is like an ocean in which the universe floats like an island. Awed by the infinite expanse around us, we in the universe constantly try to fathom this personality—each one of us in his or her own way. But each person's perception is unique, as is the knowledge we obtain thereby.

This book is one such humble attempt to comprehend this supreme reality. The essays contained here were originally published in the January 2011 issue of the English journal *Prabuddha Bharata*.

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Swami Vivekananda is a name which brings to us the images of a saint, a prophet, a reformer, a humanist, and much more. Translating the teachings of his master Sri Ramakrishna, into philosophy and precept, the Swami shifted the focus of religion from celestial beings to human beings. The true significance of his work is brought home to us only when we see his work on the larger timeline of the religio-philosophical history of the world. This is precisely what Swami Satprakashananda does in this volume and thus effectively delineates the contribution of Swami Vivekananda to the present age.



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